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THE LAND OF PROMISE  
HOME AND BEAUTY  
OUR BETTERS  
THE LETTER

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.

# OUR BETTER

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

W. S. MAUGHAM



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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN LT

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This play was produced at the Globe Theatre on September 12, 1923, with the following cast:

LADY GEORGE GRAYSTON	...	Margaret Bannerman.
DUCHESS DE SURENNES	...	Constance Collier.
PRINCIPESSA DELLA CERCOLA		Marion Terry.
ELIZABETH SAUNDERS	...	Alice Mosley.
ARTHUR FENWICK	...	Alfred Drayton.
THORNTON CLAY	...	Yorke Stephens.
FLEMING HARVEY	...	Stuart Sage.
ANTONY PAXTON	...	Reginald Owen.
LORD BLEANE	...	John Stuart.
POLE ..	...	E. A. Walker.
ERNEST	...	Henry Ford.

NOTE.—The author wishes to state that the person ages of the play are entirely imaginary.

## CHARACTERS

LADY GEORGE GRAYSTON.

DUCHESS DE SURENNES.

PRINCIPESSA DELLA CERCOLA

ELIZABETH SAUNDERS.

ARTHUR FENWICK.

THORNTON CLAY.

FLEMING HARVEY.

ANTONY PAXTON.

LORD BLEANE.

POLE.

ERNEST.

---

*The action of the play takes place at LADY GEORGE GRAYSTON'S house in Grosvenor Street, Mayfair, and at her husband's place in Suffolk, Abbots Kenton.*

# OUR BETTERS

## ACT I

SCENE: *The drawing-room at LADY GEORGE GRAYSTON'S house in Grosvenor Street, Mayfair. It is a sumptuous double room, of the period of George II., decorated in green and gold, with a coromandel screen and lacquer cabinets; but the coverings of the chairs, the sofas and cushions, show the influence of Bakst and the Russian Ballet; they offer an agreeable mixture of rich plum, emerald green, canary and ultra-marine. On the floor is a Chinese carpet, and here and there are pieces of Ming pottery.*

*It is about half-past four, early in the season, and a fine day.*

*When the curtain rises, from the street below is heard the melancholy chant of the lavender man.*

Won't you buy my sweet lavender?  
Sixteen blue branches for a penny.  
If you buy it once,  
You'll buy it twice,  
For it makes your clothes  
Smell very nice—  
Sweet-scented lavender.

BESSIE SAUNDERS comes in. *She is a very pretty American girl, of twenty-two, with fair hair and blue eyes. She is dressed in the latest mode.*

*She wears a hat and gloves, and carries a bag. She has just come in from the street. She has in her hand a telephone message, and going over to the telephone she takes up the receiver.*

BESSIE.

Gerrard 4321. Is that the Berkeley? Put me through to Mr. Harvey, please. Fleming Harvey, that's right. [*She listens and smiles.*] Yes. Who d'you think it is? [*She laughs.*] I've just got your telephone message. Where have you sprung from? That's fine. How long are you staying in London? I see. I want to see you at once. Nonsense. This very minute. Now just jump into a taxi and come right away. Pearl will be in presently. Ring off, Fleming. No, I will not ring off first. [*A pause.*] Are you there? How tiresome you are. You might be half-way here by now. Well, hustle.

*[She puts down the receiver and begins to take off her gloves. POLE, the butler, comes in with a bunch of roses.]*

POLE.

These flowers have just come for you, miss.

BESSIE.

Oh! Thank you. Aren't they lovely? You must give me something to put them in, Pole.

POLE.

I'll bring a vase, miss.

*[He goes out. She buries her face in the flowers and inhales their fragrance. The BUTLER enters with a bowl filled with water.]*

BESSIE.

Thank you. You're sure they *are* for me ? There's no label.

POLE.

Yes, miss. The person who brought them said they was for you, miss. I asked if there wasn't a card, and he said no, miss.

BESSIE.

[*With a faint smile.*] I think I know who they're from. [*She begins to arrange the flowers.*] Her ladyship hasn't come in yet, has she ?

POLE.

Not yet, miss.

BESSIE.

D'you know if anyone is coming in to tea ?

POLE.

Her ladyship didn't say, miss

BESSIE.

You'd better prepare for fifteen then.

POLE.

Very good, miss.

BESSIE.

I was being funny, Pole.

POLE.

Yes, miss ? Shall I take the paper away, miss ?



BESSIE.

[*With a slight sigh of resignation.*] Yes, do, will you?  
[*The telephone bell rings.*] Oh, I forgot, I switched the telephone on here. See who it is.

[*POLE takes up the receiver and listens, then puts his hand over its mouth.*]

POLE.

Will you speak to Lord Bleane, miss?

BESSIE.

Say I'm not at home.

POLE.

Miss Saunders hasn't come in yet. I beg pardon, my lord, I didn't recognise your lordship's voice. [*A pause.*] Well, my lord, I did hear them say there was a private view they thought of going to at the Grosvenor. You might find Miss Saunders there.

BESSIE.

You needn't elaborate, Pole.

POLE.

I was only making it more convincing, miss. [*Listening.*] I think so, my lord. Of course, I couldn't say for certain, my lord; they might have gone out to Ranelagh.

BESSIE.

Really, Pole!

POLE.

Very good, my lord. [*He puts down the receiver.*]  
His lordship asked if you was expected in to tea, miss.

BESSIE.

I see.

POLE.

Is there anything else, miss ?

BESSIE.

No, Pole, thank you.

[*He goes out. She finishes arranging the flowers. The door is flung open and LADY GEORGE GRAYSTON comes in, followed by FLEMING HARVEY. PEARL—LADY GEORGE GRAYSTON—is a handsome, dashing creature, a woman of thirty-four, with red hair, and a complexion outrageously painted. She is dressed in a Paris frock, but of greater daring both in colour and cut than a Frenchwoman would wear. FLEMING is a nice-looking young American in clothes that were obviously made in New York.*]

PEARL.

My dear Bessie, I've found an entirely strange young man on the doorstep who says he is a cousin.

BESSIE.

[*Giving him her hands enthusiastically.*] Fleming.

FLEMING.

I introduced myself to Lady George. She drove up just as they were opening the door. Please reassure your sister, Bessie. She looks upon me with suspicion.

BESSIE.

You must remember Fleming Harvey, Pearl.

PEARL.

I've never set eyes on him in my life. But he looks quite nice.

BESSIE.

He is.

PEARL.

He's apparently come to see you.

FLEMING.

I rang up five minutes ago and Bessie ordered me to come round right away.

PEARL.

Well, make him stop to tea. I've got to telephone. I've suddenly remembered that I've asked twelve people to dinner.

BESSIE.

Does George know ?

PEARL.

Who is George ?

BESSIE.

Don't be absurd, Pearl—George—your husband.

PEARL.

Oh ! I couldn't make out who you meant. No, he doesn't know. But what's much more important, the cook doesn't know either. I'd forgotten George was in London. *[She goes out.]*

BESSIE.

George generally dines out when Pearl is giving a party, because he doesn't like people he doesn't know, and he seldom dines at home when we're alone, because it bores him.

FLEMING.

It doesn't sound as if Lord George enjoyed many of the benefits of home life.

BESSIE.

Now let's sit down and make ourselves comfortable. You are going to stay to tea, aren't you ?

FLEMING.

It's not a beverage that I'm in the habit of imbibing.

BESSIE.

When you've been in England a month you won't be able to do without it. When did you land ?

FLEMING.

This morning. You see, I've lost no time in coming to see you.

BESSIE.

I should think not. It is good to see someone straight from home.

FLEMING.

Have you been having a good time, Bessie ?

BESSIE.

Wonderful ! Since the beginning of the season, except when Pearl has had people here, I've been out to lunch and dinner every day, and I've been to a ball every night, generally two and sometimes three.

FLEMING.

Gee !

BESSIE.

If I stopped now I'd drop down dead.

FLEMING.

D'you like England ?

BESSIE.

I adore it. I think it's too bad of dad never to have let me come over to London before. Rome and Paris are nothing. We're just trippers there, but here we're at home.

FLEMING.

Don't get too much at home, Bessie.

BESSIE.

Oh, Fleming, I never thanked you for sending me the roses. It was perfectly sweet of you.

FLEMING.

[*With a smile.*] I didn't send you any roses.

BESSIE.

Didn't you ? Well, why didn't you ?

FLEMING.

I hadn't time. But I will.

BESSIE.

It's too late now. I naturally thought they were from you, because Englishmen don't send flowers in the same way as American boys do.

FLEMING.

Is that so ?

[*There is a slight pause. BESSIE gives him a quick look.*]

BESSIE.

Fleming, I want to thank you for that charming letter you wrote me.

FLEMING.

There's no occasion to do that, Bessie.

BESSIE.

I was afraid you might feel badly about it. But we'll always be the greatest friends, won't we ?

FLEMING.

Always.

BESSIE.

After all, you were eighteen when you asked me to marry you, and I was sixteen. It wasn't a very serious engagement. I don't know why we didn't break it off before.

FLEMING.

I suppose it never occurred to us.

BESSIE.

I'd almost forgotten it, but when I came over here I thought I'd better make everything quite clear.

FLEMING.

[*With a smile.*] Bessie, I believe you're in love.

BESSIE.

No, I'm not. I tell you I'm having a wonderful time.

FLEMING.

Well, who sent you the roses ?

BESSIE.

I don't know. Lord Bleane.

FLEMING.

You're not going to marry a lord, Bessie ?

BESSIE.

Have you any objection ?

FLEMING.

Well, on first principles, I think American girls had better marry American men, but then I happen to be an American man.

[BESSIE looks at him for a moment.]

BESSIE

Pearl gave a dinner party last night. I was taken in by a cabinet minister, and on the other side of me I had an ambassador. Just opposite was a man who'd been Viceroy in India. Madame Angelotti dined with us, and she sang afterwards, and a lot of people came on from an official dinner in their stars and ribands. Pearl looked superb. She's a wonderful hostess, you know. Several people told me they would rather come here than to any house in London. Before Pearl married George Grayston she was engaged to a boy who was in business in Portland, Oregon.

FLEMING.

[*Smiling.*] I see you're quite determined to marry a lord.

BESSIE.

No, I'm not. I'm keeping an open mind on the subject.

FLEMING.

What d'you mean by that ?

BESSIE.

Well, Fleming, it hasn't escaped my notice that a certain noble lord is not unwilling to lay his beautiful coronet at my feet.

FLEMING.

Don't talk like a novelette, Bessie.

BESSIE.

But it feels just like a novelette. The poor dear is trying to propose to me every time he sees me, and I'm doing all I can to prevent him.



FLEMING.

Why ?

BESSIE.

I don't want to refuse him, and then wish I hadn't.

FLEMING.

You could easily make him ask you again. Women find that so simple.

BESSIE.

Ah, but supposing he went right away to shoot big game in Africa. It's what they do, you know, in novelettes.

FLEMING.

I'm reassured about one thing. You're not in the least in love with him.

BESSIE.

I told you I wasn't. You don't mind my saying all this to you, Fleming ?

FLEMING.

Gracious, no; why should I ?

BESSIE.

You're sure you don't feel sore at my throwing you over ?

FLEMING.

[*Cheerfully.*] Not a bit.

BESSIE.

I am glad, because then I can tell you all about the noble lord.

FLEMING.

Has it occurred to you that he wants to marry you for your money ?

BESSIE.

You can put it more prettily. You can say that he wants to marry me with my money.

FLEMING.

And is that a prospect that allures you ?

BESSIE.

Poor dear, what else can he do ? He's got a large place to keep up, and he simply hasn't a cent.

FLEMING.

Really, Bessie, you amaze me.

BESSIE.

I shan't when you've been here a month.

[PEARL comes in.]

PEARL.

Now, Bessie, tell me all about this strange young man.

BESSIE.

He's quite capable of telling you about himself.

PEARL.

[To Fleming.] How long are you staying ?

FLEMING.

A couple of months. I want to see something of English life.

PEARL.

I see. D'you want to improve your mind or d'you want to go into society ?

FLEMING.

I suppose I couldn't combine the two.

PEARL.

Are you rich ?

FLEMING.

Not at all.

PEARL.

It doesn't matter, you're good-looking. If one wants to be a success in London one must either have looks, wit, or a bank-balance. You know Arthur Fenwick, don't you ?

FLEMING.

Only by reputation.

PEARL.

How superciliously you say that !

FLEMING.

He provides bad food to the working classes of the United States at an exorbitant price. I have no doubt he makes a lot of money.

BESSIE.

He's a great friend of Pearl's.

PEARL.

When he first came over because they turned up their noses at him in New York, I said to him: My dear Mr. Fenwick, you're not good-looking, you're not amusing, you're not well-bred, you're only rich. If you want to get into society you must spend money.

FLEMING.

It was evidently in the nature of a straight talk.

BESSIE.

We must do what we can for Fleming, Pearl.

PEARL.

[*With a chuckle.*] We'll introduce him to Minnie Surennes.

FLEMING.

Who in the world is she ?

PEARL.

The Duchesse de Surennes. Don't you remember ? She was a Miss Hodgson. Chicago people. Of course, they're nobody in America, but that doesn't matter over here. She adores good-looking boys, and I daresay she's getting rather tired of Tony. [*To Bessie.*] By the way, they're coming in this afternoon.

BESSIE.

I don't like Tony.

PEARL.

Why not ? I think he's charming. He's the most unprincipled ruffian I ever met.

FLEMING.

Is Tony the duke ?

PEARL.

What duke ? Her husband ? Oh no, she divorced him years ago.

BESSIE.

I think Fleming would like the Princess much better.

PEARL.

Oh, well, he'll meet her here to-day, too.

BESSIE.

She was a Miss van Hoog, Fleming.

FLEMING.

Is she divorced too ?

PEARL.

Oh no, her husband's an Italian. It's very difficult to get a divorce in Italy. She's only separated. She's quite nice. She's one of my greatest friends. She bores me a little.

[POLE comes in to announce THORNTON CLAY and then goes out. THORNTON CLAY is a stout American with a bald head and an effusive manner. He is somewhat overdressed. He speaks with a marked American accent.]

POLE.

Mr. Thornton Clay.

CLAY.

How d'you do ?

PEARL.

You're the very person we want, Thornton. An entirely strange young man has suddenly appeared on my doorstep, and says he's my cousin.

CLAY.

My dear Pearl, that is a calamity which we Americans must always be prepared for.

BESSIE.

I won't have you say such things, Mr. Clay. Fleming is not only our cousin, but he's my very oldest friend. Aren't you, Fleming ?

PEARL.

Bessie has a charming nature. She really thinks that friendship puts one under an obligation.

FLEMING.

Since you're talking of me, won't you introduce me to Mr. Clay ?

PEARL.

How American you are !

FLEMING.

[*Smiling.*] It's not unnatural, is it ?

PEARL.

We haven't over here the passion that you have in America for introducing people. My dear Thornton,

allow me to present to you my long-lost cousin, Mr. Fleming Harvey.

CLAY.

It's so long since I was in America that I almost forget, but I believe the proper answer to that is Mr. Fleming Harvey, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance

FLEMING.

Aren't you an American, Mr. Clay ?

CLAY.

I won't deny that I was born in Virginia.

FLEMING.

I beg your pardon, I thought from the way you spoke . . .

CLAY.

[*Interrupting.*] But, of course, my home is London.

PEARL.

Nonsense, Thornton, your home is wherever there's a first-class hotel.

CLAY.

I went to America seven years ago. My father died and I had to go and settle up his affairs. Everyone took me for an Englishman.

FLEMING.

That must have gratified you very much, Mr. Clay.

CLAY.

Of course, I haven't a trace of an American accent. I suppose that was the reason. And then my clothes.  
[*He looks down at them with satisfaction.*]

PEARL.

Fleming wants to see life in London, Thornton. He can't do better than put himself under your wing.

CLAY.

I know everyone who's worth knowing. I can't deny that.

PEARL.

Thornton calls more countesses by their Christian names than any man in town.

CLAY.

I'll get him cards for some good balls, and I'll see that he's asked to one or two of the right parties.

PEARL.

He's good-looking, and I'm sure he dances well. He'll be a credit to you, Thornton.

CLAY.

[*To Fleming.*] But, of course, there's really nothing I *can* do for you. At Lady George's you are in the very hub of society. I don't mean the stuffy, old-fashioned society, that goes about in barouches and bores itself stiff, but the society that counts, the society that figures in the newspapers. Pearl is the most wonderful hostess in London.



PEARL.

What *do* you want, Thornton ?

CLAY.

In this house, sooner or later, you'll meet every remarkable man in England except one. That is George Grayston. And he's only remarkable because he's her husband.

PEARL.

[*With a chuckle.*] I might have known you were only saying a pleasant thing in order to make the next one more disagreeable.

CLAY.

Of course, I can't make out why you never ask George to your parties. Personally I like him.

PEARL.

That's all the nicer of you, Thornton, since he always speaks of you as "that damned snob."

CLAY.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] Poor George, he has such a limited vocabulary. I met Flora della Cercola at luncheon to-day. She told me she was coming to tea with you.

PEARL.

She's getting up a concert in aid of something or other, and she wants me to help her.

CLAY.

Poor Flora, with her good works! She takes philanthropy as a drug to allay the pangs of unrequited love.

PEARL.

I always tell her she'd do much better to take a lover.

CLAY.

You'll shock Mr. Harvey.

PEARL.

It won't hurt him. It'll do him good.

CLAY.

Did you ever know her husband?

PEARL.

Oh yes, I met him. Just the ordinary little Dago I cannot imagine why she should ever have been in love with him. She's an extraordinary creature. D'you know, I'm convinced that she's never had an affair.

CLAY.

Some of these American women are strangely sexless.

FLEMING.

I have an idea that some of them are even virtuous.

PEARL.

[*With a smile.*] It takes all sorts to make a world.

[*POLE enters to announce the DUCHESSE DE SURENNES, and then goes out.*]

POLE.

The Duchesse de Surennes.

*[The DUCHESS is a large, dark woman of forty-five with scarlet lips and impudent painted cheeks, a woman of opulent form, bold, self-assured, and outrageously sensual. She suggests a drawing of a Roman Emperor by Aubrey Beardsley. She is gowned with a certain dashing magnificence, and wears a long string of large pearls round her neck. During the conversation POLE and two footmen bring in tea, and place it in the back drawing-room.]*

PEARL.

My dear, how nice of you to come.

DUCHESS.

Isn't Tony here ?

PEARL.

No.

DUCHESS.

He said he was coming straight here.

PEARL.

I daresay he's been delayed.

DUCHESS.

I can't understand it. He telephoned a quarter of an hour ago that he was starting at once.

PEARL.

*[Reassuringly.]* He'll be here presently.

DUCHESSE.

[*With an effort over herself.*] How pretty you're looking, Bessie. No wonder all the men I meet rave about you.

BESSIE.

Englishmen are so shy. Why don't they rave *to* me?

DUCHESSE.

They'll never let you go back to America.

PEARL.

Of course, she's never going back. I'm determined that she shall marry an Englishman.

CLAY.

She'll make a charming addition to our American peeresses.

PEARL.

And there'll be another that you can call by her Christian name, Thornton.

BESSIE.

I wish you wouldn't talk as if I hadn't a word to say in the matter.

CLAY.

Of course, you've got a word to say, Bessie—a very important one.

BESSIE.

Yes, I suppose?

CLAY.

Exactly.

PEARL.

Pour out the tea, darling, will you ?

BESSIE.

Surely. [*To CLAY.*] I know you don't share Fleming's contempt for tea, Mr. Clay.

CLAY.

I couldn't live a day without it. Why, I never travel without a tea basket.

FLEMING.

[*Ironically.*] Is that so ?

CLAY.

You Americans who live in America . . .

FLEMING.

[*Under his breath.*] So queer of us.

CLAY.

Despise the delectable habit of drinking tea because you are still partly barbarous. The hour that we spend over it is the most delightful of the day. We do not make a business of eating as at luncheon or dinner. We are at ease with ourselves. We toy with pretty cakes as an excuse for conversation. We discuss the abstract, our souls, our morals; we play delicately with the concrete, our neighbour's new bonnet or her latest lover. We drink tea because we are a highly civilised nation.

FLEMING.

I must be very stupid, but I don't follow.

CLAY.

My dear fellow, the degree of a nation's civilisation is marked by its disregard for the necessities of existence. You have gone so far as to waste money, but we have gone farther; we waste what is infinitely more precious, more transitory, more irreparable—we waste time.

DUCHESSE.

My dear Thornton, you fill me with despair. Compton Edwardes has cut me off my tea. I thought he was only depriving me of a luxury, now I see he's depriving me also of a religious rite.

FLEMING.

Who in heaven's name is Compton Edwardes, that he should have such influence ?

PEARL.

My dear Fleming, he's the most powerful man in London. He's the great reducer.

FLEMING.

Gracious ! What does he reduce ?

PEARL.

Fat.

DUCHESSE.

He's a perfect marvel, that man. Do you know, the Duchess of Arlington told me he'd taken nine pounds off her.

PEARL.

My dear, that's nothing. Why, Lady Hollington gave me her word of honour she'd lost over a stone.

BESSIE.

[*From the tea-table.*] Anyone who wants tea must come and fetch it.

[*The men saunter over to the next room, while PEARL and the DUCHESS go on with their conversation.*]

DUCHESS.

Who is that nice-looking young man, Pearl ?

PEARL.

Oh, he's a young American. He pretends to be a cousin of mine. He's come to see Bessie.

DUCHESS.

Does he want to marry her ?

PEARL.

Good heavens, I hope not. He's only an old friend. You know the funny ways they have in America.

DUCHESS.

I suppose nothing is really settled about Harry Bleane ?

PEARL.

No. But I shouldn't be surprised if you saw an announcement in the *Morning Post* one day.

DUCHESSE.

Has she enough money for him ?

PEARL.

She has a million.

DUCHESSE.

Not pounds ?

PEARL.

Oh no, dollars.

DUCHESSE.

That's only eight thousand a year. I shouldn't have thought he'd be satisfied with that.

PEARL.

People can't expect so much nowadays. There won't be any more enormous heiresses as there were in your time. Besides, Harry Bleane isn't such a catch as all that. Of course, it's better to be an English baron than an Italian count, but that's about all you can say for it.

DUCHESSE.

Of course she'll accept him ?

PEARL.

Oh yes, she's crazy to live in England. And as I tell her, it's quite pleasant to be a peeress even now.

DUCHESSE.

What on earth can have happened to Tony ?



PEARL.

My dear, he's not likely to have been run over by a motor-bus.

DUCESSE.

I'm not afraid of motor-buses running over him; I'm afraid of him running after Gaiety girls.

PEARL.

[*Drily.*] I should have thought you kept a very sharp eye on him.

DUCESSE.

You see, he hasn't got anything to do from morning till night.

PEARL.

Why doesn't he get a job ?

DUCESSE.

I've been trying to get him something, but it's so difficult. You've got such a lot of influence, Pearl. Can't you do something ? I should be so grateful.

PEARL.

What can he do ?

DUCESSE.

Anything. And as you know he's very good-looking.

PEARL.

Does he know French and German ?

DUCESSE.

No, he has no gift for languages.

PEARL.

Can he type and write shorthand ?

DUCHESSE.

Oh, no. Poor dear, you can hardly expect that.

PEARL.

Can he do accounts ?

DUCHESSE.

No, he has no head for figures.

PEARL.

[*Reflectively.*] Well, the only thing I can see that he'd do for is a government office.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, my dear, if you only could manage that. You can't think what a comfort it would be for me to know that he couldn't get into mischief at least from ten to four every day.

[POLE announces TONY PAXTON. TONY is a handsome youth of twenty-five, in beautiful clothes, with engaging manners and a charming smile.]

POLE.

Mr. Paxton.

PEARL.

Well, Tony, how is life ?

TONY.

Rotten. I haven't backed a winner or won a rubber this week.

PEARL.

Ah well, that's the advantage of not having money, you can afford to lose it.

DUCESSE.

[*Bursting in.*] Where have you been, Tony ?

TONY.

I ? Nowhere.

DUCESSE.

You said you were coming straight here. It doesn't take twenty-five minutes to get here from Dover Street.

TONY.

I thought there wasn't any hurry. I was just hanging about the club.

DUCESSE.

I rang up the club again, and they said you'd gone.

TONY.

[*After a very slight pause.*] I was downstairs having a shave, and I suppose they never thought of looking for me in the barber's shop.

DUCESSE.

What on earth did you want to be shaved for at half-past four in the afternoon ?

TONY.

I thought you'd like me to look nice and clean.

PEARL.

Go and get Bessie to give you some tea, Tony; I'm sure you want it after the strenuous day you've had.  
[*He nods and walks into the inner room.*]

PEARL.

Minnie, how can you be so silly? You can't expect to keep a man if you treat him like that.

DUCESSE.

I know he's lying to me, there's not a word of truth in anything he says: but he's so slim I can never catch him out. Oh, I'm so jealous.

PEARL.

Are you really in love with him?

DUCESSE.

He's everything in the world to me.

PEARL.

You shouldn't let yourself be carried away like this.

DUCESSE.

I'm not cold-blooded like you.

PEARL.

You seem to have a passion for rotters, and they always treat you badly.

DUCESSE.

Oh, I don't care about the others. Tony is the only one I've ever really loved.

PEARL

Nonsense! You were just as much in love with Jack Harris. You did everything in the world for him. You taught him to wear his clothes. You got him into society. And the moment he could do without you he chucked you. Tony will do just the same.

DUCHESS.

I'm not going to be such a fool this time. I'm going to take care he can't do without me.

PEARL.

I can't imagine what you see in him. You must know that . . .

DUCHESS.

[*Interrupting.*] There's very little I don't know. He's a liar, a gambler, an idler, a spendthrift, but in his way he is fond of me. [*Appealingly.*] You can see he's fond of me, can't you?

PEARL.

He's so much younger than you, Minnie.

DUCHESS.

I can't help it. I love him.

PEARL.

Oh, well, I suppose it's no good talking. As long as he makes you happy.

DUCHESSE.

He doesn't. He makes me miserable. But I love him. . . . He wants me to marry him, Pearl.

PEARL.

You're not going to ?

DUCHESSE.

No, I won't be such a fool as that. If I married him I'd have no hold over him at all.

[Enter POLE to announce the PRINCESS DELLA CERCOLA. She is a tall, thin woman of thirty-five, with a pale, haggard face and great dark eyes. She is a gentle, kind creature, but there is something pathetic, almost tragic, in her appearance. She is dressed, though very well, and obviously by a Paris dressmaker, more quietly than the DUCHESSE or PEARL. She has not only wealth, but distinction.]

POLE.

Princess della Cercola.

[Exit. PEARL gets up to receive her. They kiss.]

PEARL.

Darling !

PRINCESS.

D'you hate me for coming to bother you. I rang up because I know how difficult you are to catch. [Kissing the Duchesse.] How are you, Minnie ?

DUCHESSE.

Don't ask me for a subscription, Flora. I'm so poor.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling.*] Wait till I tell you what it's for, and then you'll remember that you had a father called Spencer Hodgson.

DUCHESSE.

[*With a little groan.*] As if I wanted to be reminded of it!

PEARL.

You're so absurd, Minnie. You should make a joke of the pork. I always tell people about father's hardware store, and when I haven't got a funny story to tell about it, I invent one.

PRINCESS.

You've made your father quite a character in London.

PEARL.

That's why I never let him come over. He couldn't possibly live up to his reputation.

[FLEMING HARVEY comes forward from the inner room.]

FLEMING.

I'm going to say good-bye to you.

PEARL.

You mustn't go before I've introduced you to Flora. Flora, this is Mr. Fleming Harvey. He's just come from America. He probably carries a six-shooter in his hip-pocket,

FLEMING.

I'm told I mayn't say I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, Princess.

PRINCESS.

When did you land ?

FLEMING.

This morning.

PRINCESS.

I envy you.

FLEMING.

Because I landed this morning ?

PRINCESS.

No, because a week ago you were in America.

DUCHESS.

Flora !

FLEMING.

I was beginning to think it was something to be rather ashamed of.

PRINCESS.

Oh, you mustn't pay any attention to Pearl and the Duchesse. They're so much more English than the English.

PEARL.

I notice you show your devotion to the country of your birth by staying away from it, Flora.

PRINCESS.

Last time I was in America it made me so unhappy that I vowed I'd never go there again.



DUCHESSE.

I was there ten years ago, when I was divorcing Gaston. I hadn't been in America since my marriage, and I'd forgotten what it was like. Oh, it was so crude. Oh, it was so provincial. You don't mind my saying so, Mr. Harvey?

FLEMING.

Not at all. You're just as American as I am, and there's no reason why among ourselves we shouldn't abuse the mother that bore us.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, but I don't look upon myself as American. I'm French. After all, I haven't a trace of an American accent. To show you how it got on my nerves, I almost didn't divorce Gaston because I thought I couldn't bring myself to stay in America long enough.

PRINCESS.

It's not because it was crude and provincial that I was unhappy in America. And heaven knows, Boston isn't either. I was unhappy because after all it was home, the only real home I've ever had, and I was a stranger.

PEARL.

My dear Flora, you're being very sentimental.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling.*] I'm sorry; I apologise. You're a New Yorker, Mr. Harvey?

FLEMING.

I'm proud of it, madam.

PRINCESS.

New York's wonderful, isn't it ? It has something that no other city in the world has got. I like to think of Fifth Avenue on a spring day. The pretty girls in their smart frocks and neat shoes, who trip along so gaily, and all the good-looking boys.

DUCHESS.

I grant that; some of the boys are too lovely for words.

PRINCESS.

Everyone is so strong and confident. There's such an exaltation in the air. You feel in the passers-by a serene and unshakable belief in the future. Oh, it's very good to be alive in Fifth Avenue on a sunny day in April.

FLEMING.

It's good for an American to hear another American say such pleasant things about his country.

PRINCESS.

You must come and see me, and you shall tell me all the news of home.

PEARL.

How high the newest building is, and how much money the latest millionaire has got.

FLEMING.

Good-bye.

PEARL.

Have you made friends with Thornton Clay ?

FLEMING.

I hope so.

PEARL.

You must get him to give you the address of his tailor.

FLEMING.

Aren't you pleased with my clothes ?

PEARL.

They're very American, you know.

FLEMING.

So am I.

[THORNTON CLAY comes forward. The  
DUCHESS strolls over to the inner room and  
is seen talking with BESSIE and TONY  
PAXTON.]

PEARL.

Thornton, I was just telling Mr. Harvey that you'd take him to your tailor.

CLAY.

I was going to suggest it.

FLEMING.

My clothes are not at all a success.

PEARL.

Who d'you go to ? Stultz ?

CLAY.

Of course. He's the only tailor in London. [*To FLEMING.*] Of course he's a German, but art has no nationality.

FLEMING.

I'm pleased at all events to think that it's a German tailor who's going to make me look like an Englishman.

[*He goes out. THORNTON makes his farewells.*]

CLAY.

Good-bye, Pearl.

PEARL.

Are you going? Don't forget you're coming down to Kenton on Saturday.

CLAY.

I won't indeed. I adore your week-end parties, Pearl. I'm so exhausted by Monday morning that I'm fit for nothing for the rest of the week. Good-bye.

[*He shakes hands and goes out. As he is going, POLE opens the door to announce LORD BLEANE. He is a young man, very English in appearance, pleasant, clean and well-groomed.*]

POLE.

Lord Bleane.

[*Exit.*]

PEARL.

Dear Harry, how nice of you to come

BLEANE.

I'm in absolute despair.

PEARL.

Good heavens, why ?

BLEANE.

They're sending a mission to Rumania to hand the Garter to some bigwig, and I've got to go with it.

PEARL.

Oh, but that'll be very interesting.

BLEANE.

Yes, but we start to-morrow, and I shan't be able to come down to Kenton on Saturday.

PEARL.

When do you come back ?

BLEANE.

In four weeks.

PEARL.

Then come down to Kenton the Saturday after that.

BLEANE.

May I ?

PEARL.

You must go and break the news to Bessie. She was so looking forward to your visit.

BLEANE

D'you think she'll give me some tea ?

PEARL.

I have no doubt, if you ask her nicely.

*[He goes over to the inner room.]*

PRINCESS.

Now I've got you to myself for two minutes. You will help me with my concert, won't you ?

PEARL.

Of course. What do you want me to do ? I'll make Arthur Fenwick take any number of tickets. You know how charitable he is.

PRINCESS.

It's for a very good cause.

PEARL.

I'm sure it is. But don't harrow me with revolting stories of starving children. I'm not interested in the poor.

PRINCESS.

*[Smiling.]* How can you say that ?

PEARL.

Are you ? I often wonder if your philanthropy isn't an elaborate pose. You don't mind my saying that, do you ?

PRINCESS.

[*Good-humouredly.*] Not at all. You have no heart, and you can't imagine that anyone else should have.

PEARL.

I have plenty of heart, but it beats for people of my own class.

PRINCESS.

I've only found one thing really worth doing with all this money I have, and that is to help a little those who need help.

PEARL.

[*With a shrug.*] So long as it makes you happy.

PRINCESS.

It doesn't, but it prevents me from being utterly miserable.

PEARL.

You make me so impatient, Flora. You've got more money than you know what to do with. You're a princess. You've practically got rid of your husband. I cannot imagine what more you want. I wish I could get rid of mine.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling.*] I don't know what you've got to complain of in George.

PEARL.

That's just it. I shouldn't mind if he beat me or made love to chorus girls. I could divorce him then.

Oh, my dear, thank your stars that you had a husband who was grossly unfaithful to you. Mine wants me to live nine months of the year in the country and have a baby every five minutes. I didn't marry an Englishman for that.

PRINCESS.

Why *did* you marry him ?

PEARL.

I made a mistake. I'd lived all my life in New York. I was very ignorant. I thought if you were a lord you must be in society.

PRINCESS.

I often wonder if you're happy, Pearl.

PEARL.

Do you ? Of course I'm happy.

PRINCESS.

An ambassador told me the other day that you were the most powerful woman in London. It's very wonderful how you've made your way. You had nothing very much to help you.

PEARL.

Shall I tell you how it was done ? By force of character, wit, unscrupulousness, and push.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling.*] You're very frank.



PEARL.

That has always been my pose.

PRINCESS.

I sometimes think there's positive genius in the way you've ignored the snubs of the great.

PEARL.

[*With a chuckle.*] You're being very unpleasant, Flora.

PRINCESS.

And there's something very like heroism in the callousness with which you've dropped people when they've served your turn.

PEARL.

You're driving me to the conclusion that you don't altogether approve of me.

PRINCESS.

On the other hand I can't help admiring you. You've brought all the determination, insight, vigour, strength, which have made our countrymen turn America into what it is, to get what you wanted. In a way your life has been a work of art. And what makes it more complete is that what you've aimed at is trivial, transitory, and worthless.

PEARL.

My dear Flora, people don't hunt in order to catch a fox.

PRINCESS.

Sometimes, doesn't it make you rather nervous, when you're sitting on the top of your ladder, in case anyone should give it a kick as he passes ?

PEARL.

It'll want more than a kick to topple my ladder over. D'you remember when that silly woman made such a fuss because her husband was in love with me ? It wasn't till I only just escaped the divorce court that the duchesses really took me up.

[*The DUCHESS comes forward with TONY PAXTON.*]

DUCHESSE.

We really must be going, Pearl. I expect my masseur at six. Compton Edwardes told me about him. He's wonderful, but he's so run after, if you keep him waiting a moment he goes away.

PEARL.

My dear, do be careful. Fanny Hallam got herself down to a mere nothing, but it made her look a hundred.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, I know, but Compton Edwardes has recommended to me a wonderful woman who comes every morning to do my face.

PEARL.

You are coming to my ball, aren't you ?

DUCHESSE.

Of course we're coming. Yours are almost the only parties in London where one amuses oneself as much as at a night club.

PEARL.

I'm having Ernest to come in and dance.

DUCHESSE.

I thought of having him one evening. How much does he charge for coming in socially ?

PEARL.

Twenty guineas.

DUCHESSE.

Good heavens, I could never afford that.

PEARL.

What nonsense ! You're far richer than I am.

DUCHESSE.

I'm not so clever, darling. I can't think how you do so much on your income.

PEARL.

*Amused.*] I'm a very good manager.

DUCHESSE.

One would never think it. Good-bye, dear. Are you coming, Tony ?

TONY.

Yes.

*[She goes out.]*

TONY.

[*Shaking hands with PEARL.*] I've not had a word with you to-day.

PEARL.

[*Chaffing him.*] What are we to do about it ?

PRINCESS.

I *must* get Minnie to go to my concert. Minnie.

[*She goes out. TONY is left face to face with PEARL.*]

TONY.

You're looking perfectly divine to-day. I don't know what there is about you

PEARL.

[*Amused, but not disconcerted.*] It is nice of you to say so.

TONY.

I simply haven't been able to take my eyes off you

PEARL.

Are you making love to me ?

TONY.

That's nothing new, is it ?

PEARL.

You'll get into trouble.

TONY.

Don't be disagreeable, Pearl.

PEARL.

I don't remember that I ever told you you might call me Pearl.

TONY.

It's how I think of you. You can't prevent me from doing that.

PEARL.

Well, I think it's very familiar. |

TONY.

I don't know what you've done to me. I think of you all day long.

PEARL.

I don't believe it for a minute. You're an unprincipled ruffian, Tony.

TONY.

Do you mind ?

PEARL.

[*With a chuckle.*] Shameless creature. I wonder what it is that Minnie sees in you.

TONY.

I have all sorts of merits.

PEARL.

I'm glad you think so. I can only discover one.

TONY.

What is that ?

PEARL.

You're somebody else's property.

TONY.

Oh !

PEARL.

[*Holding out her hand.*] Good-bye.

[*He kisses her wrist. His lips linger. She looks at him from under her eyelashes.*]

PEARL.

It doesn't make you irresistible, you know.

TONY.

There's always the future.

PEARL.

The future's everybody's property.

TONY.

[*In an undertone.*] Pearl.

PEARL.

Be quick and go. Minnie will be wondering why you don't come.

[*He goes out.* PEARL turns away with a smile.

BESSIE and LORD BLEANE advance into the room.]

PEARL.

Has Harry broken the news to you that he can't come down to us on Saturday ?

[*The PRINCESS comes in.*]

PRINCESS.

I've got my subscription.

PEARL.

I kept Tony up here as long as I could so as to give you a chance.

PRINCESS.

[*With a laugh.*] That was really tactful.

PEARL.

Poor Minnie, she's as mean as cat's meat. [*With a glance at BESSIE and LORD BLEANE.*] If you'd like to come down to the morning-room we can go through my visitors' book and see who'll be useful to you.

PRINCESS.

Oh, that would be kind of you.

PEARL.

[*To BLEANE.*] Don't go till I come back, will you? I haven't had a word with you yet.

BLEANE.

All right.

[*PEARL and the PRINCESS go out.*]

BESSIE.

I wonder if you sent me these flowers, Lord Bleane?

BLEANE.

I did. I thought you wouldn't mind.

BESSIE.

It was very kind of you.

[*She takes two of the roses and puts them in her dress. BLEANE is overcome with shyness. He does not know how to begin.*]

BLEANE.

D'you mind if I light a cigarette ?

BESSIE.

Not at all.

BLEANE.

[*As he lights it.*] D'you know, this is the first time I've ever been alone with you. It was very tactful of Lady Grayston to leave us

BESSIE.

I'm not sure if it wasn't a trifle too tactful.

BLEANE.

I was hoping most awfully to have the chance of getting a talk with you

[*The song of the lavender is heard again in the street. BESSIE welcomes the diversion.*]

BESSIE

Oh, listen, there's the lavender man come back again. [*She goes to the window and listens.*] Throw him down a shilling, will you ?

BLEANE.

All right. [*He takes a coin from his pocket and throws it into the street.*]



BESSIE.

I seem to feel all the charm of England in that funny little tune. It suggests cottage gardens, and hedges, and winding roads.

BLEANE

My mother grows lavender at home. When we were kids we were made to pick it, and my mother used to put it in little muslin bags and tie them up with pink ribbon. And she used to put them under the pillows of one's bed and in all the drawers. Shall I ask her to send you some ?

BESSIE.

Oh, that would be such a bother for her.

BLEANE.

It wouldn't. She'd like to. And you know, it's not like the lavender you buy. It knocks spots off anything you can get in shops.

BESSIE.

You must hate leaving London at this time of year.

BLEANE.

Oh, I'm not very keen on London. [*Making a dash for it.*] I hate leaving you.

BESSIE.

[*With comic desperation.*] Let's not talk about me, Lord Bleane.

BLEANE.

But that's the only topic that occurs to me.

BESSIE.

There's always the weather in England.

BLEANE.

You see, I'm off to-morrow.

BESSIE

I never saw anyone so obstinate.

BLEANE.

I shan't see you again for nearly a month. We haven't known one another very long, and if I hadn't been going away I expect I'd have thought it better to wait a bit.

BESSIE.

[*Clasping her hands.*] Lord Bleane, don't propose to me.

BLEANE.

Why not ?

BESSIE.

Because I shall refuse you.

BLEANE.

Oh !

BESSIE.

Tell me about the part of the country you live in. I don't know Kent at all. Is it pretty ?

BLEANE.

I don't know. It's home.

BESSIE.

I love those old Elizabethan houses that you have in England with all their chimneys.

BLEANE.

Oh, ours isn't a show place, you know. It's just a rather ugly yellow brick house that looks like a box. and it's got a great big stucco portico in front of it. I think the garden's rather jolly.

BESSIE.

Pearl hates Abbots Kenton. She'd sell it if George would. She's only really happy in London.

BLEANE.

I don't know that I was so particularly struck on Bleane till I was over in France. When I was in hospital at Boulogne there didn't seem much to do but to think about things. . . . It didn't seem as if I *could* get well. I knew I should if they'd only let me come home, but they wouldn't; they said I couldn't be moved. . . . It's rather bleak in our part of the country. We've got an east wind that people find a bit trying, but if you've been used to it all your life it bucks you up wonderful. In summer it can be awfully hot down there, but there's always something fresh and salt in the air. You see, we're so near the marshes. . . . It was only just across the water, and it seemed such an awful long way off. I ain't boring you, am I?

BESSIE.

No. I want you to tell me.

BLEANE.

It's a funny sort of country. There are a lot of green fields and elm trees, and the roads wind about—it's rotten for motoring; and then you have the marshes, with dykes in them—we used to jump them when we were boys, and fall in mostly; and then there's the sea. It doesn't sound much, but I felt it was the most ripping thing I knew. And then there are hop-fields—I forgot them—and the oast-houses. They're rather picturesque, I suppose. I expect it's like the lavender to you. To me it's just England.

[BESSIE gets up and walks towards the window.  
*In the distance is heard the melancholy cry  
of the lavender man.*]

BLEANE.

What are you thinking about ?

BESSIE.

It must be very wonderful to feel like that about one's home. I've never known anything but a red stone house in Nineteenth Street. As soon as dad can get a decent offer for it we're going to move further up town. Mother has a fancy for Seventy-Second Street, I don't know why.

BLEANE.

Of course, I know it couldn't mean the same to a girl that it means to me. I shouldn't expect anyone to live there always. I can be quite happy in London.

BESSIE.

[*With a smile.*] You're determined to do it ?

BLEANE.

If you *could* bring yourself to marry me, I'd try and give you a good time.

BESSIE.

Well, I suppose that's a proposal.

BLEANE.

I've never made one before, and it makes me a bit nervous.

BESSIE.

You haven't said anything that I can answer yes or no to.

BLEANE.

I don't want to say anything that you *can* answer no to.

BESSIE.

[*With a chuckle.*] Let me say that I'll think it over, may I ?

BLEANE.

I'm going away to-morrow.

BESSIE.

I'll give you an answer when you come back.

BLEANE.

But that won't be for four weeks.

BESSIE.

It'll give us both a chance to make up our minds. After all, it is rather a serious step. You may come to the conclusion that you don't really want to marry me.

BLEANE.

There's no fear of that.

BESSIE.

You're coming down to Kenton for the week-end after you get back. If you change your mind send Pearl a wire putting yourself off. I shall understand, and I shan't be in the least hurt or offended.

BLEANE.

Then it's good-bye till then.

BESSIE.

Yes. And . . . thank you very much for wishing to marry me.

BLEANE.

Thank you very much for not refusing me outright.

*[They shake hands and he goes out. She walks over to the window to look at him, glances at the watch on her wrist, and then leaves the room. In a moment POLE shows in ARTHUR FENWICK. He is a tall elderly man with a red face and grey hair.]*

POLE.

I'll tell her ladyship you're here, sir.

FENWICK.

That'll be very good of you.

[POLE goes out. FENWICK takes a cigar from his case, and the evening paper from a table, and settles himself down comfortably to read and smoke. He makes himself very much at home. PEARL comes in.]

PEARL.

Aren't Bessie and Harry Bleane here ?

FENWICK.

No.

PEARL.

That's very strange. I wonder what can have happened.

FENWICK.

Never mind about Bessie and Harry Bleane. Give me your attention now.

PEARL.

You're very late.

FENWICK.

I like to come when I stand a chance of finding you alone, girlie.

PEARL.

I wish you wouldn't call me girlie, Arthur. I do hate it.

FENWICK.

That's how I think of you. When I'm present at one of your big set-outs, and watch you like a queen among all those lords and ambassadors and bigwigs,

I just say to myself, She's my girlie, and I feel warm all over. I'm so proud of you then. You've got there, girlie, you've got there.

PEARL.

[*Smiling.*] You've been very kind to me, Arthur.

FENWICK.

You've got brains, girlie, that's how you've done it. It's brains. Underneath your flighty ways and that casual air of yours, so that one might think you were just enjoying yourself and nothing more, I see you thinking it all out, pulling a string here and a string there; you've got them in the hollow of your hand all the time. You leave nothing to chance, Pearl, you're a great woman.

PEARL.

Not great enough to make you obey your doctor's orders.

FENWICK.

[*Taking the cigar out of his mouth.*] You're not going to ask me to throw away the first cigar I've had to-day?

PEARL.

To please me, Arthur. They're so bad for you.

FENWICK.

If you put it like that I must give in.

PEARL.

I don't want you to be ill.



FENWICK.

You've got a great heart, girlie. The world just thinks you're a smart, fashionable woman, clever, brilliant, beautiful, a leader of fashion, but I know different. I know you've got a heart of gold.

PEARL.

You're a romantic old thing, Arthur.

FENWICK.

My love for you is the most precious thing I have in the world. You're my guiding star, you're my ideal. You stand to me for all that's pure and noble and clean in womanhood. God bless you, girlie. I don't know what I should do if you failed me. I don't believe I could live if I ever found out that you weren't what I think you.

PEARL.

[*With her tongue in her cheek.*] You shan't, if I can help it.

FENWICK.

You do care for me a little, girlie?

PEARL.

Of course I do.

FENWICK.

I'm an old man, girlie.

PEARL.

What nonsense! I look upon you as a mere boy.

FENWICK.

[*Flattered.*] Well, I expect a good many young men would be glad to have my physique. I can work fourteen hours on end and feel as fresh as a daisy at the end of it.

PEARL.

Your vitality is wonderful.

FENWICK.

I sometimes wonder what it is that first drew you to me, girlie.

PEARL.

I don't know. I suppose it was the impression of strength you give.

FENWICK.

Yes, I've often been told that. It's very difficult for people to be with me long without realising that—well, that I'm not just the man in the street.

PEARL.

I always feel I can rely on you.

FENWICK.

You couldn't have said anything to please me better. I want you to rely on me. I know you. I'm the only man who's ever understood you. I know that, deep down in that big, beating, human heart of yours, you're a timid, helpless little thing, with the innocence of a child, and you want a man like me to stand between you and the world. My God, how I love you, girlie!

PEARL.

Take care, there's the butler.

FENWICK.

Oh, damn it, there's always the butler.

[POLE comes in with a telegram and a parcel of books.]

PEARL.

[Taking the telegram and glancing at the parcel.]  
What's that, Pole?

POLE.

They're books, my lady. They've just come from Hatchard's.

PEARL.

Oh, I know. Undo them, will you? [POLE cuts open the parcel and takes out a bundle of four or five books. PEARL opens the telegram.] Oh, bother! There's no answer, Pole.

POLE.

Very good, my lady.

[Exit.]

FENWICK.

Is anything the matter?

PEARL.

That fool Sturrey was dining here to-night, and he's just wired to say he can't come. I do hate having my parties upset. I'd asked ten people to meet him.

FENWICK.

That's too bad.

PEARL.

Pompous owl. He's <sup>40</sup>refused invitation after invitation. I asked him six weeks ago this time, and he hadn't the face to say he was engaged.

FENWICK.

Well, I'm afraid you must give him up. I daresay you can do without him.

PEARL.

Don't be a fool, Arthur. I'll get hold of him some how. He may be Prime Minister one of these days. [*She reflects a moment.*] I wonder what his telephone number is. [*She gets up and looks in a book, then sits down at the telephone.*] Gerrard 7035. If he comes once because I force him to he'll come again because he likes it. This house is like the kingdom of heaven: I have to compel them to come in. . . . Is Lord Sturreyin? Lady George Grayston. I'll hold the line. [*Making her voice sweet and charming.*] Is that you, Lord Sturrey? It's Pearl Grayston speaking. I just rang up to say it doesn't matter a bit about to-night. Of course, I'm disappointed you can't come. But you must come another day, will you? That's very nice of you. How about this day week? Oh, I'm sorry. Would Thursday suit you? Oh! Well, how about Friday? You're engaged every evening next week? You are in demand. Well, I'll tell you what, get your book and tell me what day you are free.

FENWICK.

You're the goods, girlie. You'll get there.

PEARL.

Tuesday fortnight. Yes, that'll suit me beautifully. 8.30. I'm so glad you chose that day, because I'm having Kreisler in to play. I shall look forward to seeing you. Good-bye. [*She puts down the receiver.*] This time I've got him. The ape thinks he understands music.

FENWICK.

Have you got Kreisler for Tuesday fortnight?

PEARL.

No.

FENWICK.

Are you sure you can get him?

PEARL.

No, but I'm sure you can.

FENWICK.

You shall have him, girlie. [*She takes the books that POLE brought in and puts them about the room. One she places face downwards, open.*] What are you doing that for?

PEARL.

They're Richard Twining's books. He's coming to dinner to-night.

FENWICK.

Why d'you trouble about authors, girlie ?

PEARL.

London isn't like New York, you know. People like to meet them over here.

FENWICK.

I should have thought your position was quite strong enough to do without them.

PEARL.

We live in a democratic age. They take the place in society of the fools whom kings kept about their courts in the middle ages. They have the advantage that they don't presume on their position to tell one home truths. They're cheap. A dinner and a little flattery is all they want. And they provide their own clothes.

FENWICK.

You litter up your house with their rotten books.

PEARL.

Oh, but I don't keep them. These are on approval. I shall send them all back to the bookseller to-morrow morning.

FENWICK.

Pearl, you're a little wonder. When you want to go into business you come to me and I'll take you into partnership.

PEARL.

How is business ?

FENWICK.

Fine! I'm opening two new branches next week. They laughed at me when I first came over here. They said I'd go bankrupt. I've turned their silly old methods upside down. He laughs longest who laughs last.

PEARL.

[*Reflectively.*] Ah, I can't help thinking that's what my dressmaker said when she sent me in my bill.

[*He gives a slight start and looks at her shrewdly.  
He sees her blandly smiling.*]

FENWICK.

Girlie, you promised me you wouldn't run up any more bills.

PEARL.

That's like promising to love, honour, and obey one's husband, the kind of undertaking no one is really expected to carry out.

FENWICK.

You naughty little thing.

PEARL.

It's Suzanne—you know, the dressmaker in the Place Vendôme. The war has dislocated her business and she wants to get her money in. It isn't very convenient for me to pay just at present. It's rather a large sum. [*She gives him a sheaf of typewritten documents.*]

FENWICK.

This looks more like a five-act play than a bill.

PEARL.

Clothes are expensive, aren't they? I wish I could dress in fig-leaves. It would be cheap, and I believe it would suit me.

FENWICK.

[*Putting the bill in his pocket.*] Well, I'll see what I can do about it.

PEARL.

You are a duck, Arthur. . . . Would you like me to come and lunch with you to-morrow?

FENWICK.

Why, sure.

PEARL.

All right. Now you must go, as I want to lie down before I dress for dinner.

FENWICK.

That's right. Take care of yourself, girlie, you're very precious to me.

PEARL.

Good-bye, dear old thing.

FENWICK.

Good-bye, girlie.

[*He goes out. As he goes to the door the telephone rings. PEARL takes up the receiver.*]



## PEARL.

You're speaking to Lady George Grayston. Tony! Of course I knew your voice. Well, what is it? I'm not at all stern. I'm making my voice as pleasant as I can. I'm sorry you find it disagreeable. [*She gives a chuckle.*] No, I'm afraid I couldn't come to tea to-morrow. I shall be engaged all the afternoon. What is the day after to-morrow? [*Smiling.*] Well, I must ask Bessie. I don't know if she's free. Of course I'm not coming alone. It would be most compromising. A nice-looking young man like you. What would Minnie say? Oh, I know all about that. . . . I didn't promise anything. I merely said the future was everybody's property. A sleepless night. Fancy! Well, good-bye. . . . Tony, do you know the most enchanting word in the English language? Perhaps.

[*She puts down the telephone quickly, and the curtain falls.*]

END OF ACT I.

## ACT II

THE SCENE is a morning-room at Abbots Kenton, the Graystons' place in the country. It has an old-fashioned, comfortable look ; nothing is very new ; the chintzes are faded. Three long french windows lead on to a terrace.

*It is after dinner, a fine night, and the windows are open.*

*The women of the party are sitting down, waiting for the men ; they are PEARL and BESSIE, the DUCHESS DE SURENNES, and the PRINCESS DELLA CERCOLA.*

PRINCESS.

You must be exhausted after all the tennis you played this afternoon, Minnie.

DUCHESS.

Not a bit.      only played four sets.

PRINCESS.

You played so vigorously. It made me quite hot to look at you.

DUCHESS.

If I didn't take exercise I should be enormous. Oh, Flora, how I envy you ! You can eat anything

you choose and it has no effect on you. And what makes it so unfair is that you don't care about food. I am a lazy and a greedy woman. I never eat any of the things I like, and I never miss a day without taking at least an hour's exercise.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling.*] If mortification is the first step in sanctity, I'm sure you must be on the high road to it.

PEARL.

One of these days you'll give up the struggle, Minnie, and, like Flora, take to good works.

DUCESSE.

[*With immense decision.*] Never! I shall lie on my death-bed with my hair waved and a little rouge on my cheeks, and with my last breath murmur: Not gruel, it's so fattening.

PEARL.

Well, you'll have more serious tennis to-morrow. Harry Bleane plays much better than Thornton.

DUCESSE.

It was very tiresome of him not to come till it was just time to dress.

PEARL.

He only got back from Rumania yesterday, and he had to go down to see his mother. [*With an amused glance at her sister.*] Bessie asked me not to put him next her at dinner.

BESSIE.

Pearl, you are a cat! I do think it's hateful the way you discuss my private affairs with all and sundry.

DUCHESSE.

My dear Bessie, they've long ceased to be your private affairs.

PEARL.

I'm afraid Bessie misses her opportunities. Just before he went to Rumania I left them alone together, and nothing happened. All my tact was wasted.

BESSIE

Your tact was too obvious, Pearl.

DUCHESSE.

Well, do be quick and bring him to the scratch, my dear. I'm growing tired of people asking me, Is he going to propose or is he not?

BESSIE.

Don't they ever ask, Is she going to accept him or is she not?

DUCHESSE.

Of course, you'll accept him.

BESSIE.

I'm not so sure.

PRINCESS.

[Smiling.] Perhaps it depends on the way he asks

PEARL.

For heaven's sake, don't expect too much romance. Englishmen aren't romantic. It makes them feel absurd. George proposed to me when he was in New York for the Horse Show. I wasn't very well that day, and I was lying down. I was looking a perfect fright. He told me all about a mare he had, and he told me all about her father and her mother and her uncles and her aunts, and then he said: [*Imitating him*] Look here, you'd better marry me.

PRINCESS.

How very sudden.

PEARL.

Oh, I said, why didn't you tell me you were going to propose? I'd have had my hair waved. Poor George, he asked *Why*?

DUCHESS.

The French are the only nation who know how to make love. When Gaston proposed to me he went down on his knees, and he took my hand, and he said he couldn't live without me. Of course I knew that, because he hadn't a cent, but still it thrilled me. He said, I was his guiding star and his guardian angel—oh, I don't know what! It was beautiful! I knew he'd been haggling with papa for a fortnight about having his debts paid; but it was beautiful.

PRINCESS.

Were you quite indifferent to him?

DUCHESS.

Oh, quite. I'd made up my mind to marry a foreigner. People weren't very nice to us in Chicago. My cousin Mary had married the Count de Moret, and mother couldn't bear Aunt Alice. She said, If Alice has got hold of a Count for Mary, I'm determined that you shall have a Duke.

PEARL.

And you did.

DUCHESS.

I wish you could have seen the fuss those Chicago people made of me when I went over last. It was hard to realise that I used to cry my eyes out because I wasn't asked to the balls I wanted to go to.

PRINCESS.

Still, I hope Bessie won't marry any man she doesn't care for.

PEARL.

My dear, don't put ideas in the child's head. The French are a much more civilised nation than we are, and they've come to the conclusion long ago that marriage is an affair of convenience rather than of sentiment. Think of the people you know who've married for love. After five years do they care for one another any more than the people who've married for money?

PRINCESS.

They have the recollection.

PEARL.

Nonsense ! As if anyone remembered an emotion when he no longer felt it !

DUCHESS.

It's true. I've been in love a dozen times, desperately, and when I've got over it and look back, though I remember I was in love, I can't for the life of me remember my love. It always seems to me so odd.

PEARL.

Believe me, Bessie, the flourishing state of father's hardware store is a much sounder basis for matrimonial happiness than any amount of passion.

BESSIE.

Oh, Pearl, what is this you've been telling people about dad selling bananas ?

PEARL.

Bananas ? Oh, I remember. They were saying that Mrs. Hanley used to wash the miners' clothes in California. That and her pearls are taking her everywhere. I wasn't going to be outdone, so I said father used to sell bananas in the streets of New York.

BESSIE.

He never did anything of the kind.

PEARL.

I know he didn't, but I thought people were getting rather tired of the hardware store, and I made a

perfectly killing story out of it. I had a new Callot frock on and I thought I could manage the bananas.

DUCHESSE.

A most unpleasant vegetable. So fattening.

[*The men come in.* THORNTON CLAY, ARTHUR FENWICK, and FLEMING. PEARL and BESSIE get up.]

BESSIE.

You've been a long time.

DUCHESSE.

Where Tony?

CLAY.

He and Bleane are finishing their cigars.

DUCHESSE.

Well, Mr. Harvey, are you still enjoying life in London?

CLAY.

He should be. I've got him invitations to all the nicest parties. But he will waste his time in sight-seeing. The other day—Thursday, wasn't it?—I wanted to take him to Hurlingham, and he insisted on going to the National Gallery instead.

PEARL.

[*Smiling.*] What an outrageous proceeding!

FLEMING.

I don't see that it was any more outrageous for me than for you. I saw you coming in just as I was going out.



PEARL.

I had a reason to go. Arthur Fenwick has just bought a Bronzino, and I wanted to see those in the National Gallery.

DUCHESSE.

I think it's much more likely that you had an assignation. I've always heard it's a wonderful place for that. You never meet any of your friends, and if you do they're there for the same purpose, and pretend not to see you.

FLEMING.

certainly only went to see the pictures.

CLAY.

But, good heavens, if you want to do that there's Christie's, and there you *will* meet your friends.

FLEMING.

I'm afraid you'll never make a man of fashion out of me, Thornton.

CLAY.

I'm beginning to despair. You have a natural instinct for doing the wrong thing. D'you know, the other day I caught him in the act of delivering half a bagful of letters of introduction? I implored him to put them in the waste-paper basket.

FLEMING.

I thought as people had taken the trouble to give them to me, it was only polite to make use of them.

CLAY.

Americans give letters so carelessly. Before you know where you are you'll know all the wrong people. And, believe me, the wrong people are very difficult to shake off.

FLEMING.

[*Amused.*] Perhaps some of my letters are to the right people.

CLAY.

Then they'll take no notice of them.

FLEMING.

It looks as though the wrong people had better manners than the right ones.

CLAY.

The right people *are* rude. They can afford to be. I was a very young man when I first came to London, and I made mistakes. All of us Americans make mistakes. It wanted a good deal of character to cut people who'd taken me about, asked me to dine, stay with them in the country, and heaven knows what, when I found they weren't the sort of people one ought to know.

PEARL.

Of course, one has to do it.

DUCHESSE.

Of course. It shows that you have a nice nature, Thornton, to worry yourself about it.

CLAY.

I'm curiously sentimental. Another of our American faults. I remember when I'd been in London two or three years, I knew pretty well everyone that was worth knowing, but I'd never been asked to Hereford House. The duchess doesn't like Americans anyway, and she'd been very disagreeable about me in particular. But I was determined to go to her ball. I felt it wasn't the sort of function I could afford to be left out of.

PEARL.

They're very dull balls.

CLAY.

I know, but they're almost the only ones you can't go to without an invitation. Well, I found out that the Duchess had a widowed sister who lived in the country with her two daughters. Lady Helen Blair. My dear, she was a very stuffy, dowdy woman of fifty-five, and her two daughters were stuffier and dower still, and if possible, older. They were in the habit of coming up to London for the season. I got introduced to them, and I laid myself out. I took them to the play, I showed them round the Academy, I stood them luncheons, I gave them cards for private views, for a month I worked like a Trojan. Then the duchess sent out her invitations, and the Blair girls had half a dozen cards for their young men. I received one, and, by George, I'd earned it. Of course, as soon as I got my invitation I dropped them, but you know I felt quite badly about it.

DUCESSE.

I expect they're used to that.

CLAY.

A strangely tactless woman, Lady Helen Blair. She wrote and asked me if I was offended about anything because I never went near them.

PEARL.

I wish those men would come, and then we could dance.

DUCESSE.

Oh, that'll be charming ! It's such good exercise, isn't it ? I'm told that you dance divinely, Mr. Harvey.

FLEMING.

I don't know about that. I dance.

DUCESSE.

[*To the PRINCESS.*] Oh, my dear, who d'you think I danced with the other night ? [*Impressively.*] Ernest.

PRINCESS.

Oh !

DUCESSE.

My dear, don't say, Oh ! like that. Don't you know who Ernest is ?

PEARL.

Ernest is the most sought after man in London

PRINCESS.

You don't mean the dancing-master ?

DUCHESS.

Oh, my dear, you mustn't call him that. He'd be furious. He isn't a professional. He gives lessons at ten guineas an hour, but only to oblige. He's invited to all the best dances.

FLEMING.

One of the things that rather surprised me at balls was to see all these dancing-masters. Do English girls like to be pawed about by Greeks, Dagos, and Bowery toughs ?

CLAY.

You Americans who live in America, you're so prudish.

DUCHESS.

Believe me, I would go to *any* dance where there was the remotest chance of meeting Ernest. It's a perfect dream to dance with him. He showed me a new step, and I can't get it quite right. I don't know what I shall do if I don't run across him again very soon.

PRINCESS.

But why don't you let him give you a lesson ?

DUCHESS.

My dear, ten guineas an hour ! I couldn't possibly afford that. I'm sure to meet him at a dance in a day or two, and I shall get a lesson for nothing.

PEARL.

You ought to make him fall in love with you.

DUCESSE.

Oh, my dear, if he only would ! But he's so run after.

[BLEANE and TONY PAXTON come in from the terrace.]

DUCESSE.

At last !

TONY.

We've been taking a stroll in the garden.

PEARL.

I hope you showed him my tea-house.

BESSIE.

It's Pearl's new toy. You must be sure to admire it.

PEARL.

I'm very proud of it. You know, George won't let me do anything here. He says it's his house, and he isn't going to have any of my muck. He won't even have new chintzes. Well, there was an old summer-house just over there, and it was all worm-eaten and horrid and tumble-down, what they call picturesque, but it was rather a nice place to go and have tea in as it had a really charming view ; I wanted to pull it down and put up a smart Japanese tea-house instead, but George wouldn't hear of it, because, if you please, his mother—a peculiarly plain

woman—used to sit and sew there. Well, I bided my time, and the other day, when George was in London, I pulled down the old summer-house, got my Japanese tea-house down from town, put it up, and had everything finished by the time George came back twenty-four hours later. He very nearly had an apoplectic stroke. If he had I should have killed two birds with one stone.

BESSIE.

Pearl!

PRINCESS.

I don't know why you've furnished it so elaborately.

PEARL.

Well, I thought in the hot weather I'd sleep there sometimes. It'll be just like sleeping in the open air.

FENWICK.

These young people want to start dancing, Pearl.

PEARL.

Where would you like to dance, in here with the ramophone, or in the drawing-room with the pianola?

BESSIE.

Oh, in the drawing-room.

PEARL.

Let's go there then.

BESSIE

[To CLAY.] Come and help me get the rolls out.

CLAY.

Right you are.

*[They go out, followed by the DUCHESS and PEARL, TONY, FENWICK, and BLEANE.]*

FLEMING.

*[To the PRINCESS.]* Aren't you coming ?

PRINCESS.

No, I think I'll stay here for the present. But don't bother about me. You must go and dance.

FLEMING.

There are enough men without me. I'm sure Thornton Clay is a host in himself.

PRINCESS.

You don't like Thornton ?

FLEMING.

He's been very kind to me since I came to London.

PRINCESS.

I was watching your face when he told that story about the Hereford ball. You must learn to conceal your feelings better.

FLEMING.

Didn't you think it was horrible ?

PRINCESS.

I've known Thornton for ten years. I'm used to him. And as you say yourself, he's very kind.



FLEMING.

That's what makes life so difficult. People don't seem to be good or bad as the squares on a chessboard are black or white. Even the worthless ones have got good traits, and it makes it so hard to know how to deal with them.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling a little.*] You don't approve of poor Thornton?

FLEMING.

What do you expect me to think of a man who's proud of having forced his way into a house where he knew he wasn't wanted? He reckons success by the number of invitations he receives. He holds himself up to me as an example. He tells me that if I want to get into society, I must work for it. What do they think of a man like Thornton Clay in England? Don't they despise him?

PRINCESS.

Everywhere, in New York just as much as in London, there are masses of people struggling to get into society. It's so common a sight that one loses the sense of there being anything disgraceful in it. Pearl would tell you that English society is a little pompous; they welcome a man who can make them laugh. Thornton is very useful. He has high spirits, he's amusing, he makes a party go.

FLEMING.

I should have thought a man could find some better use for his life than that.

PRINCESS.

Thornton has plenty of money. Do you think there is any point in his spending his life making more? I sometimes think there's too much money in America already.

FLEMING.

There are things a man can do beside making money.

PRINCESS.

You know, American wealth has reached a pitch when it was bound to give rise to a leisured class. Thornton is one of the first members of it. Perhaps he doesn't play the part very well, but remember he hasn't had the time to learn it that they've had in Europe.

FLEMING.

[*Smiling.*] I'm afraid you don't think me very charitable.

PRINCESS.

You're young. It's a real pleasure to me to know a nice clean American boy. And I'm so glad that you're not going to be dazzled by this English life that dazzles so many of our countrymen. Amuse yourself, learn what you can from it, take all the good it offers you, and go back to America.

FLEMING.

I shall be glad to go back. Perhaps I ought never to have come.

PRINCESS.

I'm afraid you're not very happy

FLEMING.

I don't know what makes you think that.

PRINCESS.

It's not very hard to see that you're in love with Bessie.

FLEMING.

Did you know that I was engaged to her ?

PRINCESS.

[*Surprised.*] No.

FLEMING.

I was engaged to her before I went to Harvard. I was eighteen then, and she was sixteen.

PRINCESS.

How very early in life you young people settle things in America !

FLEMING.

Perhaps it was rather silly and childish. But when she wrote and told me that she thought we'd better break it off, I discovered I cared more than I thought.

PRINCESS.

What did you say to her ?

FLEMING.

I couldn't try to hold her to a promise she gave when she was a schoolgirl. I answered that I sympathised and understood

PRINCESS.

When did this happen ?

FLEMING.

A couple of months ago. Then I got the chance to go over to Europe and I thought I'd come to see what was going on. It didn't take me long to tumble.

PRINCESS.

You're bearing it very well.

FLEMING.

Oh, the only thing I could do was to be pleasant. I should only have bored her if I'd made love to her. She took our engagement as an amusing joke, and there wasn't anything for me to do but to accept her view of it. She was having the time of her life. At first I thought perhaps she'd grow tired of all these balls and parties, and then if I was on the spot I might persuade her to come back to America with me.

PRINCESS.

You may still.

FLEMING.

No, I haven't a chance. The first day I arrived she told me how wonderful she thought this English life. She thinks it full and varied. She thinks it has beauty.

PRINCESS.

That sounds rather satirical.

FLEMING.

Pearl has been very nice to me. She's taken me about, I've driven with her constantly. I've sat in her box at the opera, I'm her guest at the moment. If I had any decency I'd hold my tongue.

PRINCESS.

Well ?

FLEMING.

[*Bursting out impetuously.*] There's something in these surroundings that makes me feel terribly uncomfortable. Under the brilliant surface I suspect all kinds of ugly and shameful secrets that everyone knows and pretends not to. This is a strange house in which the husband is never seen and Arthur Fenwick, a vulgar sensualist, acts as host; and it's an attractive spectacle, this painted duchess devouring with her eyes a boy young enough to be her son. And the conversation—I don't want to seem a prude, I daresay people over here talk more freely than the people I've known; but surely there are women who don't have lovers, there are such things as honour and decency and self-restraint. If Bessie is going to remain over here I wish to God she'd marry her lord at once and get out of it quickly.

PRINCESS.

D'you think she'll be happy ?

FLEMING.

Are they any of them happy ? How can they expect to be happy when they marry for . . . [The

PRINCESS *gives a sudden start, and FLEMING stops short.*] I beg your pardon. I was forgetting. Please forgive me. You see, you're so different.

PRINCESS.

I'm sorry I interrupted you. What were you going to say?

FLEMING.

It wasn't of any importance. You see, I've been thinking it over so much that it's rather got on my nerves. And I haven't been able to tell anyone what I was thinking about. I'm dreadfully sorry.

PRINCESS.

You were going to say, how can they expect to be happy when they marry for a trumpery title? You thought, they're snobs, vulgar snobs, and the misery of their lives is the proper punishment for their ignoble desires.

FLEMING.

[*Very apologetically.*] Princess.

PRINCESS.

[*Ironically.*] Princess.

FLEMING.

Believe me, I hadn't the smallest intention of saying anything to wound you.

PRINCESS.

You haven't. It's too true. Most of us who marry foreigners are merely snobs. But I wonder if it's all our fault. We're not shown a better way of

life. No one has even hinted to us that we have any duty towards our own country. We're blamed because we marry foreigners, but columns are written about us in the papers, our photographs are published, our friends are excited and envious. After all, we are human. At first, when people addressed me as Princess, I couldn't help feeling thrilled. Of course it was snobbishness.

FLEMING.

You make me feel a terrible cad.

PRINCESS.

But sometimes there've been other motives, too. Has it ever occurred to you that snobbishness is the spirit of romance in a reach-me-down? I was only twenty when I married Marino. I didn't see him as a fortune-hunting Dago, but as the successor of a long line of statesmen and warriors. There'd been a pope in his family, and a dozen cardinals, one of his ancestors had been painted by Titian; for centuries they'd been men of war, with power of life and death; I'd seen the great feudal castle, with its hundred rooms, where they had ruled as independent sovereigns. When Marino came and asked me to marry him it was romance that stood in his shoes and beckoned to me. I thought of the palace in Rome, which I had visited as a tripper, and where I might reign as mistress. I thought it was splendid to take my place after all those great ladies, Orsinis, Colonnas, Gaetanis, Aldofrandinis. I loved him.

FLEMING.

But there's no need to tell me that you could never do anything from an unworthy motive.

## PRINCESS.

My husband's family had been ruined by speculation. He was obliged to sell himself. He sold himself for five million dollars. And I loved him. You can imagine the rest. First he was indifferent to me, then I bored him, and at last he hated me. Oh, the humiliation I endured. When my child died I couldn't bear it any longer; I left him. I went back to America. I found myself a stranger. I was out of place, the life had become foreign to me; I couldn't live at home. I settled in England; and here we're strangers too. I've paid very heavily for being a romantic girl.

[BESSIE comes in.]

## BESSIE.

Really, Fleming, it's too bad of you to sit in here and flirt with the Princess. We want you to come and dance.

[*The PRINCESS, agitated, gets up and goes out into the garden.*]

## BESSIE.

[*Looking after her.*] Is anything the matter?

## FLEMING.

No.

## BESSIE.

Are you coming to dance, or are you not?

## FLEMING.

I had quite a talk with Lord Bleane after dinner, Bessie.



BESSIE.

[*Smiling.*] Well?

FLEMING.

Are you going to accept the coronet that he's dangling before your eyes?

BESSIE.

It would be more to the point if you asked whether I'm going to accept the coronet that he's laying at my feet.

FLEMING.

He's a very nice fellow, Bessie.

BESSIE.

I know that.

FLEMING.

I wanted to dislike him and I couldn't.

BESSIE.

Why?

FLEMING.

Well, I don't think much of these English lords who run after American girls for their money. I expected him to be a brainless loafer, with just enough cunning to know his market value, but he's a modest, unassuming fellow. To tell you the truth, I'm puzzled.

BESSIE.

[*Chaffing him.*] Fancy that!

FLEMING.

I think it's a low-down thing that he's doing, and yet he doesn't seem a low-down fellow.

BESSIE.

He might be in love with me, you know.

FLEMING.

Is he ?

BESSIE.

No.

FLEMING.

Are you going to marry him ?

BESSIE.

I don't know.

FLEMING.

I suppose he's come here to ask you ?

BESSIE.

[*After a short pause.*] He asked me a month ago. I promised to give him an answer when he came back from Rumania. . . . I'm in a panic. He's waiting to get me alone. I was able to be quite flippant about it when I had a month before me, but now, when I've got to say yes or no, I'm so jumpy I don't know what to do with myself.

FLEMING.

Don't marry him, Bessie.

BESSIE.

Why not ?

FLEMING.

Well, first, you're no more in love with him than he is with you.

BESSIE.

And then ?

FLEMING.

Isn't that enough ?

BESSIE.

I wonder if you realise what he offers me. Do you know what the position of an English peeress is ?

FLEMING.

Does it mean so much to be called Your Ladyship by tradesmen ?

BESSIE.

You donkey, Fleming. If I marry an American boy my life will be over; if I marry Harry Bleane it will be only just beginning. Look at Pearl. I could do what she's done; I could do more, because George Grayston isn't ambitious. I could make Harry do anything I liked. He would go into politics, and I should have a salon. Why, I could do anything.

FLEMING.

[*Dryly.*] I don't know why you should be in a panic. You've evidently made up your mind. You'll have a brilliant marriage with crowds outside the church, your photograph will be in all the papers, you'll go away for your honeymoon, and you'll come back. What will you do then ?

BESSIE.

Why, settle down.

FLEMING.

Will you break your heart like the Princess because your husband has taken a mistress, or will you take lovers like the Duchesse de Surennes, or will you bore yourself to death like Pearl because your husband is virtuous, and wants you to do your duty?

BESSIE.

Fleming, you've got no right to say things like that to me.

FLEMING.

I'm sorry if I've made you angry. I had to say it.

BESSIE.

Are you quite sure that it's for my sake you don't want me to marry Lord Bleane?

FLEMING.

Yes, I think it is. When you broke off our engagement I didn't blame you. You wouldn't have done it if you'd cared for me, and it wasn't your fault if you didn't. When I came over I saw that I could expect nothing but friendship from you. You must do me the justice to acknowledge that during this month I haven't given the smallest sign that I wanted anything else.

BESSIE.

Oh, you've been charming. You always were the best friend I've had.

FLEMING.

If in a corner of my heart I kept my love for you, that is entirely my affair. I don't know that it puts you to any inconvenience, and it pleases me. I'm quite sure that I'm only thinking now of your happiness. Go back to America, and fall in love with some nice fellow, and marry him. You'll have all my best wishes. Perhaps your life won't be so brilliant or so exciting, but it will be simpler and wholesomer, and more becoming.

BESSIE.

You're a dear, Fleming, and if I said anything disagreeable just now, forgive me. I didn't mean it. I shall always want you to be my dearest friend.

[*LORD BLEANE enters from the terrace.*]

BLEANE.

I was looking for you everywhere. I wondered where you'd got to.

[*There is a moment's pause. FLEMING HARVEY looks from BESSIE to BLEANE.*]

FLEMING.

I really must go and dance with the Duchesse or she'll never forgive me.

BLEANE.

I've just been dancing with her. My dear fellow, it's the most violent form of exercise I've ever taken.

FLEMING.

I'm in very good condition.

[*He goes out.*]

BLEANE.

Blessings on him.

BESSIE.

Why ?

BLEANE

Because he's left us alone. Ask me another.

BESSIE.

I don't think I will.

BLEANE.

Then I'll ask you one.

BESSIE.

Please don't. Tell me all about Rumania.

BLEANE.

Rumania is a Balkan State. Its capital is Bucharest. It has long been known for its mineral springs.

BESSIE.

You're in very high spirits to-night.

BLEANE.

You may well wonder. Everything has conspired to depress them.

BESSIE.

Oh, what nonsense!

BLEANE.

First I was in England thirty-six hours before I had a chance of seeing you; secondly, when I arrived you'd already gone up to dress; then, when I was expecting to sit next you at dinner, I was put between Lady George and the Princess; and, lastly, you made me pound away at that beastly pianola when I wanted to dance with you.

BESSIE.

Well, you've survived it all.

BLEANE.

What I want to point out to you is that if notwithstanding I'm in high spirits, I must have a most engaging nature.

BESSIE.

I never dreamt of denying it.

BLEANE.

So much to the good.

BESSIE.

The man's going to propose to me.

BLEANE.

No, I'm not.

BESSIE.

I beg your pardon. My mistake.

BLEANE.

I did that a month ago.

BESSIE.

There's been a change of moon since then, and no proposal holds good after the new moon.

BLEANE.

I never knew that.

BESSIE.

You've been down to see your mother.

BLEANE.

She sends you her love.

BESSIE.

Have you told her ?

BLEANE.

I told her a month ago.

[BESSIE *does not speak for a moment ; when she answers it is more gravely.*]

BESSIE.

You know, I want to be frank with you. You won't think it disagreeable of me, will you ? I'm not in love with you.

BLEANE.

I know. But you don't positively dislike me ?

BESSIE.

No. I like you very much.



BLEANE.

Won't you risk it then ?

BESSIE.

[*Almost tragically.*] I can't make up my mind.

BLEANE.

I'll do all I can to make you happy. I'll try not to make a nuisance of myself.

BESSIE.

I know quite well that I wouldn't marry you if you weren't who you are, and I'm afraid I know that you wouldn't marry me if I hadn't a certain amount of money.

BLEANE.

Oh yes, I would.

BESSIE.

It's nice of you to say so.

BLEANE.

Don't you believe it ?

BESSIE.

I suppose I'm a perfect fool. I ought to play the game prettily. You see, I know that you can't afford to marry a girl who isn't well-to-do. Everyone knows what I have. Pearl has taken good care that they should. You wouldn't ever have thought of me otherwise. We're arranging a deal. You give your title and your position, and I give my money.

It's a commonplace thing enough, but somehow it sticks in my throat.

[BLEANE *hesitates a moment, and walks up and down thinking.*]

BLEANE.

You make me feel an awful swine. The worst of it is that some part of what you say is true. I'm not such a fool that I didn't see your sister was throwing us together. I don't want to seem a conceited ass, but a fellow in my sort of position can't help knowing that many people think him rather a catch. Mothers of marriageable daughters are very transparent sometimes, you know, and if they don't marry their daughters they're determined it shan't be for want of trying.

BESSIE.

Oh, I can quite believe that. I have noticed it in American mothers, too.

BLEANE.

I knew it would be a good thing if I married you. I don't suppose I should have thought about you if I hadn't been told you were pretty well off. It's beastly now, saying all that.

BESSIE.

I don't see why.

BLEANE.

Because after a bit I found out I'd fallen in love with you. And then I didn't care if you hadn't got a bob. I wanted to marry you because—because I didn't know what to do without you.

BESSIE.

Harry !

BLEANE.

Do believe me. I swear it's true. I don't care a hang about the money. After all, we could get along without it. And I love you.

BESSIE.

It's very good to hear you say that. I'm so absurdly pleased and flattered.

BLEANE.

You do believe it, don't you ?

BESSIE.

Yes.

BLEANE.

And will you marry me ?

BESSIE.

If you like.

BLEANE.

Of course I like. [*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*]

BESSIE.

Take care, someone might come in.

BLEANE.

[*Smiling and happy.*] Come into the garden with me.

*[He stretches out his hand, she hesitates a moment, smiles, takes it, and together they go out on to the terrace.]*

*For a moment the music of a one-step is heard more loudly, and then the DUCHESS and TONY PAXTON come in. She sinks into a chair fanning herself, and he goes over to a table, takes a cigarette, and lights it.]*

DUCHESS.

Did you see? That was Harry Bleane and Bessie. I wondered where they were.

TONY.

You've got eyes like a lynx.

DUCHESS.

I'm positive they were hand in hand.

TONY.

It looks as if she'd worked it at last.

DUCHESS.

I don't know about that. It looks as if he'd worked it.

TONY.

She's not such a catch as all that. If I were a peer I'd sell myself for a damned sight more than eight thousand a year.

DUCHESS.

Don't stand so far away, Tony. Come and sit on the sofa by me.

TONY.

[*Going over to her.*] I say, I've been talking to Blean about two-seaters.

DUCESSE.

[*Very coldly.*] Oh!

TONY.

[*Giving her a look out of the corner of his eye.*] He says I can't do better than get a Talbot.

DUCESSE.

I don't see why you want a car of your own. You can always use one of mine.

TONY.

That's not the same thing. After all, it won't cost much. I can get a ripper for just over twelve hundred pounds, with a really smart body.

DUCESSE.

You talk as though twelve hundred pounds were nothing at all.

TONY.

Hang it all, it isn't anything to you.

DUCESSE.

What with the income tax and one thing and another I'm not so terribly flush just now. No one knows the claims I have on me. Because one has a certain amount of money one's supposed to be made of it.

They don't realise that if one spends it in one way one can't spend it in another. It cost me seven thousand pounds to have my house redecorated.

TONY.

[*Sulkily.*] You said I could buy myself a car.

DUCHESSE.

I said I'd think about it. I wasn't under the impression that you'd go and order one right away

TONY.

I've practically committed myself now.

DUCHESSE.

You only want a car so that you can be independent of me.

TONY.

Well, hang it all, you can't expect me to be tied to your apron-strings always. It's a bit thick if whenever I want to take a man down to play golf I have to ring up and ask if I can have one of your cars. It makes me look such an ass.

DUCHESSE.

If it's only to play golf you want it, I'm sure anyone would rather go down to the links in a comfortable Rolls-Royce than in a two-seater.

[*A silence.*]

TONY.

If you don't want to give me a car, why on earth did you say you would?

DUCESSE.

[*Putting her hand on him.*] Tony.

TONY.

For goodness' sake don't touch me.

DUCESSE.

[*Hurt and mortified.*] Tony !

TONY.

I don't want to force you to make me presents. I can quite well do without a two-seater. I can go about in omnibuses if it comes to that.

DUCESSE.

Don't you love me ?

TONY.

I wish you wouldn't constantly ask me if I love you. It is maddening.

DUCESSE.

Oh, how can you be so cruel to me !

TONY.

[*Exasperated.*] D'you think this is quite the best place to choose to make a scene ?

DUCESSE.

I love you with all my heart. I've never loved anybody as much as I love you.

TONY.

No man could stand being loved so much. D'you think it's jolly for me to feel that your eyes are glued on me whatever I'm doing? I can never put my hand out without finding yours there ready to press it.

DUCESSE.

I can't help it if I love you. That's my temperament.

TONY.

Yes, but you needn't show it so much. Why don't you leave me to do the love-making?

DUCESSE.

If I did that there wouldn't be any love-making.

TONY.

You make me look such a fool.

DUCESSE

Don't you know there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you?

TONY.

[*Quickly.*] Well, why don't you marry me?

DUCESSE

[*With a gasp.*] I can't do that. You know that I can't do that.

TONY.

Why not? You could still call yourself Duchesse de Surennes.



DUCHESSE.

No; I've always told you nothing would induce me to marry.

TONY.

That shows how much you love me.

DUCHESSE.

Marriage is so middle-class. It takes away all the romance of love.

TONY.

You simply want to have your freedom and keep me bound hand and foot. D'you think it's jolly for me to know what people say about me? After all, I have got some pride.

DUCHESSE.

I'm sure we shall be able to get you a job soon, and then no one will be able to say anything.

TONY.

I'm getting fed up with the whole business; I tell you that straight. I'd just as soon chuck it.

DUCHESSE.

Tony, you don't mean to say you want to leave me. I'll kill myself if you do. I couldn't bear it, I couldn't bear it. I'll kill myself.

TONY.

For God's sake, don't make such a row.

DUCESSE.

Say you don't mean it, Tony. I shall scream.

TONY.

After all, I've got my self-respect to think of. It seems to me the best thing would be if we put a stop to the whole thing now.

DUCESSE.

Oh, I can't lose you. I can't.

TONY.

No one can say I'm mercenary, but hang it all. one has to think of one's future. I shan't be twenty-five for ever. I ought to be settling down.

DUCESSE.

Don't you care for me any more ?

TONY.

Of course I care for you. If I didn't, d'you think I'd have let you do all you have for me ?

DUCESSE.

Then why d'you make me so unhappy ?

TONY.

I don't want to make you unhappy, but really sometimes you are unreasonable.

DUCESSE.

You mean about the car ?

TONY.

I wasn't thinking about the car then.

DUCESSE.

You can have it if you like.

TONY.

I don't want it now.

DUCESSE.

Tony, don't be unkind.

TONY.

I'm not going to take any more presents from you.

DUCESSE.

I didn't mean to be unreasonable. I'd like you to have the car, Tony. I'll give you a cheque for it to-morrow. [*Coaxingly.*] Tell me what the body's like.

TONY.

[*Sulkily.*] Oh, it's a torpedo body.

DUCESSE.

You'll take me for drives in it sometimes ?

[*He turns round and looks at her, she puts out her hand, he thaws, and smiles engagingly.*]

TONY.

I say, you are awfully kind to me.

DUCESSE.

You do like me a little, don't you ?

TONY.

Of course I do.

DUCESSE.

You have a good heart, Tony. Kiss me.

TONY.

[*Kissing her, pleased and excited.*] I saw an awfully jolly body in a shop in Trafalgar Square the day before yesterday. I've got half a mind to get the people who made your body to copy it.

DUCESSE.

Why don't you get it at the shop you saw it at ? My people are terribly expensive, and they aren't any better than anybody else.

TONY.

Well, you see, I don't know anything about the firm. I just happened to catch sight of it as I was passing.

DUCESSE.

What on earth were you doing in Trafalgar Square on Thursday ? I thought you were going to Ranelagh.

TONY.

I was put off. I hadn't got anything to do, so I thought I'd just slope round the National Gallery for half an hour.

DUCESSE.

That's the last place I should have expected you to go to.

TONY.

I don't mind having a look at pictures now and then.

[*A sudden suspicion comes to the DUCESSE that he was there with PEARL, but she makes no sign that he can see.*]

DUCESSE.

[*Blandly.*] Did you look at the Bronzinos ?

TONY.

[*Falling into the trap.*] Yes. Arthur Fenwick bought one the other day at Christie's. He paid a devil of a price for it too.

DUCESSE.

[*Clenching her hands in the effort to hide her agitation.*] Oh ?

TONY.

I do think it's rot, the prices people pay for old masters. I'm blowed if I'd give ten thousand pounds for a picture.

DUCESSE.

We'll go to the National Gallery together one of these days, shall we ?

TONY.

I don't know that I want to make a habit of it, you know.

[PEARL and THORNTON CLAY come in. During the conversation the DUCHESS surreptitiously watches PEARL and TONY for signs of an intelligence between them.]

PEARL.

I've got great news for you. Bessie and Harry Bleane are engaged.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, my dear, I'm so glad. How gratified you must be!

PEARL.

Yes, I'm delighted. You must come and congratulate them.

CLAY.

Above all we must congratulate one another. We've all worked for it, Pearl.

TONY.

He hadn't much chance, poor blighter, had he?

PEARL.

We're going to have one more dance, and then Arthur wants to play poker. You must come.

CLAY.

[To the DUCHESS.] Will you dance this with me, Minnie?

DUCHESSE.

I'd like to.

[CLAY gives her his arm. She throws TONY and PEARL a glance, and purses her lips. She goes out with CLAY.]

PEARL.

You haven't danced with me yet, Tony. You should really pay some attention to your hostess.

TONY.

I say, don't go.

PEARL.

Why not ?

TONY

Because I want to talk to you.

PEARL.

[*Flippantly.*] If you want to whisper soft nothings in my ear, you'll find the one-step exceedingly convenient.

TONY.

You're a little beast, Pearl.

PEARL.

You've been having a long talk with Minnie.

TONY

Oh, she's been making me a hell of a scene.

PEARL.

Poor thing, she can't help it. She adores you.

TONY.

I wish she didn't, and you did.

PEARL.

[*With a chuckle.*] My dear, it's your only attraction for me that she adores you. Come and dance with me.

TONY.

You've got a piece of hair out of place.

PEARL.

Have I? [*She takes a small glass out of her bag and looks at herself. As she does so TONY steps behind her and kisses her neck.*] You fool, don't do that. Anyone might see us

TONY.

I don't care.

PEARL.

I do. Arthur's as jealous as cats' meat.

TONY.

Arthur's playing the pianola.

PEARL.

There's nothing wrong with my hair.

TONY.

Of course there isn't. You're perfectly divine to-night. I don't know what there is about you.

PEARL.

You're a foolish creature, Tony.



TONY.

Let's go in the garden.

PEARL.

No, they'll be wondering where we are.

TONY.

Hang it all, it's not so extraordinary to take a stroll instead of dancing.

PEARL.

I don't want to take a stroll.

TONY.

Pearl.

PEARL.

Yes ?

*[She looks at him. For a moment they stare at one another in silence. A hot flame of passion leaps up suddenly between them, and envelops them, so that they forget everything but that they are man and woman. The air seems all at once heavy to breathe. PEARL, like a bird in a net, struggles to escape ; their voices sink, and unconsciously they speak in whispers.]*

PEARL.

Don't be a fool, Tony.

TONY.

*[Hoarsely.]* Let's go down to the tea-house.

PEARL.

No, I won't.

TONY.

We shall be quite safe there.

PEARL.

I daren't. It's too risky.

TONY.

Oh, damn the risk !

PEARL.

[*Agitated.*] I can't !

TONY.

I'll go down there and wait.

PEARL.

[*Breathlessly.*] But—if they wonder where I am.

TONY.

They'll think you've gone up to your room.

PEARL.

I won't come, Tony.

TONY.

I'll wait for you.

[*As he goes out, ARTHUR FENWICK comes in.*  
PEARL gives a slight start, but quickly recovers herself.]

FENWICK.

Look here, I'm not going on pounding away at that wretched pianola unless you come and dance, Pearl.

PEARL.

[*Exhausted.*] I'm tired, I don't want to dance any more.

FENWICK.

Poor child, you look quite pale.

PEARL.

Do I? I thought I'd put plenty of rouge on. Am I looking revolting?

FENWICK.

You always look adorable. You're wonderful. I can't think what you see in an old fellow like me.

PEARL.

You're the youngest man I've ever known.

FENWICK.

How well you know the thing to say to please me!  
[*He is just going to take her in his arms, but instinctively she draws back.*]

PEARL.

Let's play poker now, shall we?

FENWICK.

Not if you're tired, darling.

PEARL.

I'm never too tired for that.

FENWICK.

You don't know how I adore you. It's a privilege to be allowed to love you.

PEARL.

[*Sure of herself again.*] Oh, what nonsense! You'll make me vain if you say things like that.

FENWICK.

You do love me a little, don't you? I want your love so badly.

PEARL.

Why, I dote on you, you silly old thing.

[*She takes his face in her hands and kisses him, avoids his arms that seek to encircle her, and goes towards the door.*]

FENWICK.

Where are you going?

PEARL.

I'm just going to my room to arrange my face.

FENWICK.

My God, how I love you, girlie! There's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you.

PEARL.

Really?

FENWICK.

Nothing.

PEARL.

Then ring for Pole and tell him to set out the card-table and bring the counters.

FENWICK.

And I was prepared to give you a sable coat or a diamond tiara.

PEARL.

I much prefer chinchilla and emeralds.

FENWICK.

[*Taking her hand.*] Must you really go and arrange your face ?

PEARL.

Really !

FENWICK.

Be quick then. I can hardly bear you out of my sight. [*He kisses her hand.*]

PEARL.

[*Looking at him tenderly.*] Dear Arthur.

[*She goes out.* FENWICK rings the bell. Then he goes on the terrace and calls out.]

FENWICK.

Thornton, we're going to play poker Get them to come along, will you ?

CLAY.

[*Outside.*] Right-ho !

[*POLE comes in.*]

FENWICK.

Oh, Pole, get the card-table ready.

POLE.

Very good, sir.

FENWICK.

And we shall want the counters. Let's have those mother-o'-pearl ones that I brought down last time I was here.

POLE.

Very good, sir.

[*The PRINCESS comes in. POLE proceeds to bring a card-table into the centre of the room and unfolds it. He gets a box of counters out of a drawer, and puts them on the table.*]

FENWICK.

Pearl has just gone to her room. She'll be here in one minute.

PRINCESS.

[*Looking at the preparations.*] This looks like more dissipation.

FENWICK.

We were going to have a little game of poker. I don't think we ought to play very long, Pearl is looking terribly tired.

PRINCESS.

I don't wonder. She's so energetic.

FENWICK.

She does too much. Just now when I came in she was quite white. I'm really very uneasy about her. You see, she never spares herself.

PRINCESS.

Fortunately she's extremely strong.

FENWICK.

She has a constitution of iron. She's a very wonderful woman. It's very seldom you meet a woman like Pearl. She's got a remarkable brain. I've frequently discussed business with her, and I've been amazed at her clear grasp of complicated matters. I owe a great deal to her. And she's good, Princess, she's good. She's got a heart of gold.

PRINCESS.

I'm sure she has.

FENWICK.

She'll always do a good turn to anybody. She's the most generous, the most open-handed woman I've ever met.

[*The DUCHESS comes in as he says these words.*]

DUCHESS.

Who is this ?

FENWICK.

We were talking of our hostess.

DUCHESS.

I see.

*[She has her bag in her hand ; when the others are not looking she hides it behind a sofa.]*

FENWICK.

I have no hesitation in saying that Pearl is the most remarkable woman in England. Why, she's got half the Cabinet in her pocket. She's very powerful.

DUCHESS.

I have often thought that if she'd lived in the reign of Charles II. she would have been a duchess in her own right.

FENWICK.

*[Innocently.]* Maybe. She would adorn any sphere. She's got everything—tact, brains, energy, beauty.

DUCHESS.

Virtue.

FENWICK.

If I were the British people, I'd make her Prime Minister.

PRINCESS.

*[Smiling.]* You're an excellent friend, Mr. Fenwick.

FENWICK.

Of course, you've heard of her hostel for young women alone in London ?



DUCHESSE.

[*Sweetly.*] Yes, there was a great deal about it in the papers, wasn't there ?

FENWICK.

That's a thing I've always admired in Pearl. She has a thoroughly modern understanding of the value of advertisement.

DUCHESSE.

Yes, she has, hasn't she ?

FENWICK.

Well, believe me, she conceived the idea of that hostel, built it, endowed it, organised it, all on her own. It cost twenty thousand pounds.

DUCHESSE.

But surely, Mr. Fenwick, you paid the twenty thousand pounds. Pearl hasn't got sums like that to throw away on charity.

FENWICK.

I gave the money, but the money isn't the important thing. The idea, the organisation, the success, are all due to Pearl.

DUCHESSE.

It has certainly been one of the best advertised of recent philanthropic schemes.

[THORNTON CLAY, BESSIE, BLEANE, and  
FLEMING *come in.*]

CLAY.

We're all dying to play poker.

FENWICK.

The table is ready.

BESSIE.

Where is Pearl ?

FENWICK.

She's gone to her room. She'll be back in a minute.

*[They gather round the table and sit down.]*

BESSIE.

You're going to play, Princess ?

PRINCESS.

Oh, I don't think so, I'll look on. I'm going to bed in a minute.

BESSIE.

Oh, you must play.

*[The PRINCESS smiles, shrugs her shoulders, and approaches the table.]*

FENWICK.

Leave a place for Pearl.

DUCHESS.

You must leave one for Tony, too.

CLAY.

What's he doing ?

DUCHESSE.

He'll be here presently.

FENWICK.

Shall I give out the counters? What would you like to play for?

PRINCESS.

Don't let it be too high.

DUCHESSE.

How tiresome of you, Flora! I think I'm in luck to-night.

FENWICK.

We don't want to ruin anyone. Shilling antes. Will that suit you?

PRINCESS.

Very well.

FENWICK.

[To CLAY.] The whites are a shilling, Thornton, reds two, and blues five bob. Mr. Harvey, you might count some out, will you?

FLEMING.

Sure.

[*The three of them start counting out the counters.*]

DUCHESSE.

Oh, how stupid of me, I haven't got my bag.

FENWICK.

Never mind, we'll trust you.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, I'd rather pay at once. It saves so much bother. Besides, I hate not having my bag.

PRINCESS.

One always wants to powder one's nose if one hasn't got it.

DUCHESSE.

Bessie dear, I left it in Pearl's new tea-house. Do run and fetch it for me.

BESSIE.

Certainly.

BLEANE.

No, I'll go.

DUCHESSE.

You won't find it.

BLEANE.

Bet you a bob I do.

[*The DUCHESSE gives a gesture of irritation, but he is gone before she can stop him.*]

FENWICK.

There's five pounds here. Will you take them, Princess?

PRINCESS.

Thank you. Here's my money.

DUCHESSE

I'll give you my fiver as soon as Harry brings my bag.

CLAY.

How on earth came you to leave it in the tea-house ?

DUCHESS.

I'm so careless. I'm always leaving my bag about.

FLEMING.

Here's another five pounds.

PRINCESS.

What beautiful counters they are!

FENWICK.

I'm glad you like them. I gave them to Pearl. They've got her initials on them.

CLAY.

Let's have a hand before Pearl comes. Lowest deals.

*[They all cut.]*

FLEMING.

Table stakes, I suppose ?

FENWICK.

Oh yes, it makes it a much better game.

CLAY.

Your deal, Fenwick.

FENWICK.

Ante up, Princess.

PRINCESS.

I beg your pardon.

[*She pushes forward a counter. FENWICK deals.  
The others take up their cards.*]

FENWICK.

Two shillings to come in.

FLEMING.

I'm coming in.

BESSIE.

I always come in.

FENWICK.

I oughtn't to, but I shall all the same. Are you going to make good your ante, Princess ?

PRINCESS.

I may just as well, mayn't I ?

FENWICK.

That's how I've made a fortune. By throwing good money after bad. Would you like a card ?

PRINCESS.

I'll have three.

[*FENWICK gives them to her.*]

CLAY.

The Princess has got a pair of deuces.

FLEMING.

I'll have one.

[*FENWICK gives it to him.*]

BESSIE.

One never gets that straight, Harvey. I'll take five.

FENWICK.

That's what I call a real sport.

CLAY.

Nonsense. It just means she can't play.

BESSIE.

It would be rather a sell for you if I got a flush.

CLAY.

It would, but you haven't.

[FENWICK *has given her cards and BESSIE looks at them.*]

BESSIE.

You're quite right. I haven't.

[*She flings them down. Through the next speeches the business with the cards follows the dialogue.*]

FENWICK.

Don't you want any cards, Duchesse ?

DUCHESSE

No, I'm out of it

CLAY.

I'll have three. I thought you were in luck.

DUCHESSE.

Wait a minute. You'll be surprised.

FENWICK.

Dealer takes two.

CLAY.

Who bets ?

PRINCESS.

I'm out of it.

CLAY.

I said it was a pair of deuces.

FLEMING.

I'll bet five shillings.

CLAY.

I'll take it and raise five shillings.

FENWICK.

I suppose I must risk my money. What have I got to put down ? Ten shillings ?

FLEMING.

There's five shillings, and I'll raise you five shillings more.

CLAY.

No, I've had enough.

FENWICK.

I'll take you and raise you again.



FLEMING.

Very well. And once more.

FENWICK.

I'll see you.

[BLEANE comes in. *The DUCHESSE has been watching for him.*]

DUCHESSE.

Ah, there's Harry.

FENWICK.

[*To FLEMING.*] What have you got ?

DUCHESSE.

Did you find my bag ?

BLEANE.

[*With a gasp.*] No, it wasn't there.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, but I remember distinctly leaving it there. Bessie, do go. I knew Harry wouldn't find it.

BESSIE.

[*With a smile.*] Clumsy idiot.

BLEANE.

[*Hastily.*] No, don't go, Bessie.

BESSIE.

[*Surprised.*] Why on earth not ?

BLEANE.

[*Embarrassed.*] You can't get into the tea-house.

BESSIE.

Nonsense.

DUCHESSE.

How d'you know the bag isn't there, then ?

BLEANE.

[*In a strained voice.*] The door of the tea-house is locked.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, it can't be. I saw Pearl and Tony go in there just now.

BESSIE.

Harry !

[*Without realising what she is about she makes a movement as if to go out, but BLEANE stops her.*]

BLEANE.

No, don't go. For God's sake, don't go.

[*She stares at him for a moment, and then suddenly understands.*]

BESSIE.

How horrible !

[*She hides her face and bursts into a flood of tears.*]

PRINCESS.

[*Starting to her feet.*] Minnie, you devil! What have you been doing?

DUCHESS.

Don't ask what I've been doing.

FENWICK

You must be mistaken. Pearl went up to her room.

DUCHESS.

Go and look for her. . . .

[*FENWICK is about to start from his chair. The PRINCESS puts her hand on his shoulder.*]

PRINCESS.

Where are you going?

DUCHESS.

I saw her.

[*For a moment there is a pause.*]

CLAY.

[*In an embarrassed way.*] Well, we'd better go on with our game, hadn't we?

[*The PRINCESS and BLEANE are bending over BESSIE trying to get her to control herself.*]

FLEMING.

That was your money, Mr. Fenwick.

FENWICK.

[*Staring in front of him, with a red face and blood-shot eyes, under his breath.*] The slut. The slut.

[*The DUCHESS takes her bag from behind the cushion, gets out the stick for her lips, and her mirror, and begins to paint them.*]

CLAY.

You'd better deal, Fleming. The Princess won't play, I expect.

DUCHESS.

Deal me cards. I want to play.

CLAY.

Bleane, come on. We'd better go on with our game. Take Bessie's chips.

[*BLEANE comes forward. FLEMING deals the cards. A stormy silence hangs over the party, broken only by the short speeches referring to the game; they play to try and relieve the tension. They are all anxiously awaiting PEARL, afraid she will come, knowing she must, and dreading the moment; they are nervous and constrained.*]

CLAY.

Your ante, Bleane.

[*BLEANE puts forward a counter. The cards are dealt in silence.*]

CLAY.

I'm coming in.

[FENWICK looks at his cards, puts forward a couple of counters, but does not speak. FLEMING puts forward counters.]

FLEMING.

D'you want a card ?

BLEANE.

Three, please.

CLAY.

Two.

FENWICK.

[With an effort over himself.] I'll have three.

[FLEMING deals them as they ask. Just as he has given FENWICK his, PEARL comes in, followed by TONY. TONY is smoking a cigarette.]

PEARL.

Oh, have you started already ?

FENWICK.

[Violently] Where have you been ?

PEARL.

I ? My head was aching a little and I went for a turn in the garden. I found Tony composing a sonnet to the moon.

FENWICK.

You said you were going to your room.

PEARL.

What are you talking about ?

[*She looks round, sees the DUCHESSE's look of angry triumph, and gives a slight start.*]

DUCHESSE.

Once too often, my dear, once too often.

[PEARL takes no notice. She sees BESSIE. BESSIE has been staring at her with miserable eyes, and now she hides her face. PEARL realises that everything is discovered. She turns coolly to TONY.]

PEARL.

You damned fool, I told you it was too risky.

END OF ACT II.

■

## ACT III

[*The SCENE is the same as in the last act, the morning-room at Kenton.*

*It is next day, Sunday, about three in the afternoon, and the sun is shining brightly.*

*The PRINCESS, THORNTON CLAY, and FLEMING are sitting down. FLEMING lights another cigarette.]*

PRINCESS.

Is it good for you to smoke so many cigarettes ?

FLEMING.

I shouldn't think so.

CLAY.

He must do something.

PRINCESS.

Perhaps you can get up a game of tennis later on.

FLEMING.

It's very hot for tennis.

CLAY.

Besides, who will play ?

PRINCESS.

You two could have a single.

CLAY.

If we only had the Sunday papers it would be something.

PRINCESS.

You can hardly expect them in a place like this. I don't suppose there are many trains on Sunday.

CLAY.

I wonder if dinner is going to be as cheerful as luncheon was.

FLEMING.

Did Pearl send any explanation for not appearing at luncheon?

PRINCESS.

I haven't an idea.

CLAY.

I asked the butler where she was. He said she was ~~was~~ lunching in bed. I wish I'd thought of that.

PRINCESS.

I'm afraid we were rather silent.

CLAY.

Silent! I shall never forget that luncheon. Minnie subdued—and silent. Tony sulky—and silent. Bessie frightened—and silent. Blean embarrassed—and silent. Fenwick furious—and silent. I tried



to be pleasant and chatty. It was like engaging the pyramids in small-talk. Both of you behaved very badly. You might have given me a little encouragement.

FLEMING.

I was afraid of saying the wrong thing. The Duchesse and Bessie looked as if they'd burst into tears on the smallest provocation.

PRINCESS.

I was thinking of Pearl. What a humiliation! What a horrible humiliation!

FLEMING.

What d'you think she'll do now?

CLAY.

That's what I'm asking myself. I have an idea that she won't appear again till we're all gone.

PRINCESS.

I hope she won't. She's always so sure of herself, I couldn't bear to see her pale and mortified.

CLAY.

She's got plenty of courage.

PRINCESS.

I know. She may force herself to face us. It would be a dreadful ordeal for all of us.

FLEMING.

D'you think she's feeling it very much?

PRINCESS.

She wouldn't be human if she weren't. I don't suppose she slept any better last night than the rest of us. Poor thing, she must be a wreck.

FLEMING.

It was a terrible scene.

PRINCESS.

I shall never forget it. The things that Minnie said. I couldn't have believed such language could issue from a woman's throat. Oh, it was horrible.

CLAY.

It was startling. I've never seen a woman so beside herself. And there was no stopping her.

FLEMING.

And with Bessie there.

PRINCESS.

She was crying so much, I doubt if she heard.

CLAY.

I was thankful when Minnie had the hysterics and we were able to fuss over her and dab her face and slap her hands. It was a very welcome diversion.

FLEMING.

Does she have attacks like that often ?

CLAY.

I know she did when the young man before Tony married an heiress. I think she has one whenever there's a crisis in the affairs of her heart.

FLEMING.

For goodness' sake, Thornton, don't talk about it as if it were a joke.

CLAY.

[*Surprised.*] What's the matter, Fleming ?

FLEMING.

I think it's abominable to treat the whole thing so flippantly.

CLAY.

Why, I was very sympathetic. I wasn't flippant. Who got the sal volatile ? I got the sal volatile.

FLEMING.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] I daresay my nerves are a bit on edge. You see, before, I only thought things were rather queer. It's come as, well, as a shock to discover exactly what the relations are between all these people. And what I can't very easily get over is to realise that I'm the only member of the party who doesn't take it as a matter of course.

CLAY.

We shall never make a man of the world of you, Fleming.

FLEMING.

I'm afraid that didn't sound very polite, Princess. I beg your pardon.

PRINCESS.

I should have few friends if I demanded the standard that you do. I've learned not to judge my neighbours.

FLEMING.

Is it necessary to condone their vices ?

PRINCESS.

You don't understand. It's not entirely their fault. It's the life they lead. They've got too much money and too few responsibilities. English women in our station have duties that are part of their birthright, but we, strangers in a strange land, have nothing to do but to enjoy ourselves.

FLEMING.

Well, I thank God Bleane is a decent man, and he'll take Bessie out of all this.

[*The DUCHESS comes in. Unlike the PRINCESS, who is in a summer frock, suitable for the country, the DUCHESS wears a town dress and a hat.*]

PRINCESS.

You've been changing your frock, Minnie.

DUCHESS.

Yes, I'm leaving this house in half an hour. I'd have gone this morning, if I'd been able to get away.

I always thought it a detestable hole, but now that I've discovered there are only two trains on Sunday, one at nine, and the other at half-past four, I have no words to express my opinion of it.

CLAY.

Yet you have an extensive vocabulary, Minnie.

DUCHESSE.

I've been just as much a prisoner as if I'd been shut up with lock and key. I've been forced to eat that woman's food. I thought every mouthful would choke me.

PRINCESS.

Do keep calm, Minnie. You know how bad it is for you to upset yourself.

DUCHESSE.

As soon as I found there wasn't a train I sent over to the garage and said I wanted to be taken to London at once. Would you believe it, I couldn't get a car.

CLAY.

Why not ?

DUCHESSE.

One of the cars went up to town early this morning, and the other is being overhauled. There's nothing but a luggage cart. I couldn't go to London in a luggage cart. As it is I shall have to go to the station in it. I shall look ridiculous.

CLAY.

Have you ordered it ?

DUCHESSE.

Yes. It's to be round at the door in a few minutes

CLAY.

What on earth can Pearl have sent the car up to London for ?

DUCHESSE.

To show her spite.

PRINCESS.

That's not like her.

DUCHESSE.

My dear, she's been my greatest friend for fifteen years. I know her through and through, and I tell you that she hasn't a got single redeeming quality. And why does she want to have the car overhauled to-day ? When you're giving a party the least you can do is to see that your cars are in running order.

PRINCESS.

Oh, well, that was an accident. You can't blame her for that.

DUCHESSE.

I only have one thing to be thankful for, and that is that she has had the decency to keep to her room. I will be just. It shows at least that she has some sense of shame.

CLAY.

You know, Minnie, Pearl has a good heart. She didn't mean to cause you pain.

DUCHESSE.

Are you trying to excuse her, Thornton ?

CLAY.

No, I think her conduct is inexcusable.

DUCHESSE.

So do I. I mean to have nothing more to do with her. It's a judgment on me. I disliked her the first time I saw her. One should always trust one's first impressions. Now my eyes are opened. I will never speak to her again. I will cut her dead. I hope you'll tell her that, Thornton.

CLAY.

If that's a commission you're giving me, it's not a very pleasant one.

PRINCESS.

Will you let me have a word or two with Minnie ?

CLAY.

Why, of course. Come along, Fleming.

[CLAY and FLEMING HARVEY go into the garden.]

DUCHESSE.

My dear, if you're going to ask me to turn the other cheek, don't. Because I'm not going to. I'm going to do all I can to revenge myself on that woman. I'm going to expose her. I'm going to tell everyone how she's treated me. When I was her guest.

PRINCESS.

You must take care what you say for your own sake, Minnie.

DUCESSE.

I know quite enough about her to make her position in London impossible. I'm going to ruin her.

PRINCESS.

What about Tony ?

DUCESSE.

Oh, I've finished with him. Ah ! I'm not the kind of woman to stand that sort of treatment. I hope he'll end in the gutter.

PRINCESS.

Don't you care for him any more ?

DUCESSE.

My dear, if he was starving, and went down on his bended knees to me for a piece of bread, I wouldn't give it to him. He revolts me.

PRINCESS.

Well, I'm very glad. It distressed me to see you on those terms with a boy like that. You're well rid of him.

DUCESSE.

My dear, you needn't tell me that. He's a thorough wrong 'un, and that's all there is about it. He hasn't even had the decency to try and excuse himself. He hasn't even made an attempt to see me.



PRINCESS.

[*Gives her a quick look.*] After all, he never really cared for you. Anyone could see that.

DUCESSE.

[*Her voice breaking.*] Oh, don't say that, Flora. I couldn't bear it. He loved me. Until that woman came between us I know he loved me. He couldn't help loving me. I did everything in the world for him. [*She bursts into tears.*]

PRINCESS.

Minnie. My dear, don't give way. You know what a worthless creature he is. Haven't you any self-respect?

DUCESSE.

He's the only man I've ever loved. I could hardly bear him out of my sight. What shall I do without him?

PRINCESS.

Take care, here he is.

[*TONY comes in. He is startled at seeing the DUCESSE. She turns away and hurriedly dries her tears.*]

TONY.

Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't know anyone was here. I was looking for some cigarettes.

[*He stands there awkwardly, not knowing whether to go or stay. The PRINCESS looks at him reflectively. There is a moment's*

*silence. Then she shrugs her shoulders and goes out. He looks at the DUCHESSÉ who stands with her back to him. He hesitates a moment, then, almost on the tips of his toes, walks over to the cigarettes, fills his case, takes another look at the DUCHESSÉ, and is in the act of tip-toeing out of the room when she stops him with her question.]*

DUCHESSÉ.

Where are you going ?

TONY.

Nowhere in particular.

DUCHESSÉ.

Then you'd better stay here.

TONY.

I thought you wished to be alone.

DUCHESSÉ.

Is that why you've kept away from me all day ?

*[He sinks sulkily into an armchair. The DUCHESSÉ finally turns round and faces him.]*

DUCHESSÉ.

Haven't you got anything to say for yourself at all ?

TONY.

What's the good of talking ?

DUCHESSE.

You might at least say you're sorry for the pain you've caused me. If you'd had any affection for me you wouldn't have done all you could to avoid me.

TONY.

I knew you'd only make a scene.

DUCHESSE.

Good heavens, you surely don't expect me not to make a scene.

TONY.

The whole thing's very unfortunate.

DUCHESSE.

Ha ! Unfortunate. You break my heart and then you say it's unfortunate.

TONY.

I didn't mean that. I meant it was unfortunate that you caught us out.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, hold your stupid tongue. Every word you say is more unfortunate than the last.

TONY.

It's because I knew you'd take offence at everything I said that I thought the best thing I could do was to keep out of the way.

DUCESSE.

You're heartless, heartless. If you'd had any decent feeling you couldn't have eaten the lunch you did. But you munched away, munched, munched, munched, till I could have killed you.

TONY.

Well, I was hungry.

DUCESSE.

You oughtn't to have been hungry.

TONY.

What are you going to do about it ?

DUCESSE.

About your appetite ? Pray to God your next mouthful chokes you.

TONY.

No, about the other.

DUCESSE.

I'm going to leave this house this afternoon.

TONY.

D'you want me to come, too ?

DUCESSE.

What d'you suppose it matters to me whether you go or stay ?

TONY.

If you go I shall have to go, too.

DUCESSE.

You ought to start soon then. It's four miles to the station. I shall be obliged if you will not get in the same carriage as me.

TONY.

I'm not going to walk. They can run me down in a car.

DUCESSE.

There's nothing but a luggage cart. and I'm going in that.

TONY.

Isn't there room for me ?

DUCESSE.

No.

TONY.

When d'you want me to move out of my flat ?

DUCESSE.

What has that got to do with me ?

TONY.

You know very well that *I* can't pay the rent.

DUCESSE.

That's your look-out.

TONY.

I shall go to the colonies.

DUCESSE.

That's the very best thing you can do. I hope you'll have to break stones, and dig, and paint—with lead paint. I hope you're miserable.

TONY.

Oh, well, it'll have its compensations.

DUCESSE.

Such as ?

TONY.

I shall be my own master. I was about fed up with this, I can tell you.

DUCESSE.

Yes, you can say that now.

TONY.

D'you think it was all jam, never being able to call my soul my own ? I was sick to death of it.

DUCESSE.

You cad !

TONY.

Well, you may just as well know the truth.

DUCESSE.

D'you mean to say you never cared for me ? Not even at the beginning ?

*[He shrugs his shoulders, but does not answer. She speaks the next phrases in little gasps gradually weakening as her emotion overcomes her. He stands before her in sulky silence.]*

DUCESSE.

Tony, I've done everything in the world for you. I've been like a mother to you. How *can* you be so ungrateful. You haven't got any heart. If you had you'd have asked me to forgive you. You'd have made some attempt to . . . Don't you *want* me to forgive you ?

TONY.

What d'you mean by that ?

DUCESSE.

If you'd only asked me, if you'd only shown you were sorry, I'd have been angry with you, I wouldn't have spoken to you for a week, but I'd have forgiven you—I'd have forgiven you, Tony. But you never gave me a chance. It's cruel of you, cruel !

TONY.

Well, anyhow, it's too late now.

DUCESSE.

Do you want it to be too late ?

TONY.

It's no good grousing about the past. The thing's over now.

DUCESSE.

Aren't you sorry ?

TONY.

I don't know. I suppose I am in a way. I don't want to make you unhappy.

DUCHESSE.

If you wanted to be unfaithful to me, why didn't you prevent me from finding out? You didn't even trouble to take a little precaution.

TONY.

I was a damned fool, I know that.

DUCHESSE.

Are you in love with that woman?

TONY.

No.

DUCHESSE.

Then why did you? Oh, Tony, how could you?

TONY.

If one felt about things at night as one does next morning, life would be a dashed sight easier.

DUCHESSE.

If I said to you, Let's let bygones be bygones and start afresh, what would you say, Tony?

*[She looks away. He rests his eyes on her reflectively.]*

TONY.

We've made a break now. We'd better leave it at that. I shall go out to the colonies.

DUCHESSE.

Tony, you don't mean that seriously. You could never stand it. You know, you're not strong. You'll only die.



TONY.

Oh, well, one can only die once.

DUCESSE.

I'm sorry for all I said just now, Tony. I didn't mean it.

TONY.

It doesn't matter.

DUCESSE.

I can't live without you, Tony.

TONY.

I've made up my mind. It's no good talking.

DUCESSE.

I'm sorry I was horrid to you, Tony. I'll never be again. Won't you forget it? Oh, Tony, won't you forgive me? I'll do anything in the world for you if only you won't leave me.

TONY.

It's a rotten position I'm in. I must think of the future.

DUCESSE.

Oh, but Tony, I'll make it all right for you.

TONY.

It's very kind of you, but it's not good enough. Let's part good friends, Minnie. If I've got to walk to the station, it's about time I was starting. [*He holds out his hand to her.*]

DUCESSE.

D'you mean to say it's good-bye? Good-bye for ever? Oh, how can you be so cruel!

TONY.

When one's made up one's mind to do a thing, it's best to do it at once.

DUCESSE.

Oh, I can't bear it. I can't bear it. [*She begins to cry.*] Oh, what a fool I was! I ought to have pretended not to see anything. I wish I'd never known. Then you wouldn't have thought of leaving me.

TONY.

Come, my dear, pull yourself together. You'll get over it.

DUCESSE.

[*Desperately.*] Tony, if you want to marry me—I'm willing to marry you.

[*A pause.*]

TONY.

I should be just as dependent on you. D'you think it would be jolly for me having to come to you for every five pounds I wanted?

DUCESSE.

I'll settle something on you so that you'll be independent. A thousand a year. Will that do?

TONY.

You are a good sort, Minnie. [*He goes over and sits down beside her.*]

DUCESSE.

You will be kind to me, won't you ?

TONY.

Rather ! And look here, you needn't give me that two-seater. I shall be able to drive the Rolls-Royce.

DUCESSE.

You didn't want to go to the colonies, did you ?

TONY.

Not much.

DUCESSE.

Oh, Tony, I do love you so.

TONY.

That's right. .

DUCESSE.

We won't stay another minute in this house. Ring the bell, will you ? You'll come with me in the luggage cart ?

TONY.

[*Touching the bell.*] I much prefer that to walking.

DUCESSE.

It's monstrous that there shouldn't be a motor to take luggage to the station. It's a most uncomfortable house to stay in.

TONY.

Oh, beastly. D'you know that I didn't have a bathroom attached to my bedroom ?

[POLE comes in.]

DUCESSE.

Is the luggage cart ready, Pole ?

POLE.

I'll enquire, your grace.

DUCESSE.

My maid is to follow in the morning with the luggage. Mr. Paxton will come with me. [To TONY] What about your things ?

TONY.

Oh, they'll be all right. I brought my man with me.

POLE.

Her ladyship is just coming downstairs, your grace.

DUCESSE.

Oh, is she ? Thank you, that'll do, Pole.

POLE.

Very good, your grace.

[He goes out. As soon as he closes the door behind him the DUCESSE springs to her feet.]

DUCHESS.

I won't see her. Tony, see if Thornton is on the terrace.

TONY.

All right. [*He goes to the french window.*] Yes. I'll call him, shall I? Clay, come here a minute, will you?

[*He goes out. THORNTON CLAY comes in, followed immediately by the PRINCESS and FLEMING.*]

DUCHESS.

Thornton, I'm told Pearl is coming downstairs.

CLAY.

At last.

DUCHESS.

I won't see her. Nothing will induce me to see her.

PRINCESS.

My dear, what is to be done? We can't make her remain upstairs in her own house.

DUCHESS.

No, but Thornton can speak to her. She's evidently ashamed of herself. I only ask one thing, that she should keep out of the way till I'm gone.

CLAY.

I'll do my best.

DUCHESS.

I'm going to walk up and down till the luggage cart is ready. I haven't taken my exercise to-day.

[*She goes out.*]

CLAY.

If Pearl is in a temper that's not a very pleasant message to give her.

PRINCESS.

You won't find her in a temper. If she's dreadfully upset, tell her what Minnie says gently.

FLEMING.

Here is Bessie. [*She comes in.*] It appears that Pearl is just coming downstairs

BESSIE.

Is she ?

PRINCESS.

Have you seen her this morning, Bessie ?

BESSIE.

No. She sent her maid to ask me to go to her, but I had a headache and couldn't.

[*They look at her curiously. She is inclined to be abrupt and silent. It may be imagined that she has made up her mind to some course, but what that is the others cannot tell. FLEMING goes over and sits beside her.*]

FLEMING.

I'm thinking of going back to America next Saturday, Bessie.

BESSIE.

Dear Fleming, I shall be sorry to lose you.

FLEMING.

I expect you'll be too busy to think about me. You'll have to see all kinds of people, and then there's your trousseau to get.

BESSIE.

I wish you could come over to Paris with me, Princess, and help me with it.

PRINCESS.

I? [*She gets an inkling of what BESSIE means.*] Of course, if I could be of any help to you, dear child . . . [*She takes BESSIE's hand and gives her a fond smile. BESSIE turns away to hide a tear that for a moment obscures her eyes.*] Perhaps it's a very good idea. We must talk about it.

[PEARL comes in. *She is perfectly cool and collected, radiant in a wonderful, audacious gown; she is looking her best and knows it. There is nothing in her manner to indicate the smallest recollection of the episode that took place on the preceding evening.*]

PEARL.

[*Brightly.*] Good-morning.

CLAY.

Good-afternoon.

PEARL.

I knew everyone would abuse me for coming down so late. It was such a lovely day I thought it was a pity to get up.

CLAY.

Don't be paradoxical, Pearl, it's too hot.

PEARL.

The sun streamed into my room, and I said, It's a sin not to get up on a morning like this. And the more I said I ought to get up, the more delightful I found it to lie in bed. How is your head, Bessie ?

BESSIE.

Oh, it's better, thank you.

PEARL.

I was sorry to hear you weren't feeling up to the mark.

BESSIE.

I didn't sleep very well.

PEARL.

What have you done with your young man ?

BESSIE.

Harry ? He's writing letters

PEARL.

Spreading the glad tidings, I suppose. You ought to write to his mother, Bessie. It would be a graceful attention. A charming, frank little letter, the sort of thing one would expect an *ingénue* to write. Straight from the heart.



CLAY.

I'm sure you'd love to write it yourself, Pearl.

PEARL.

And we must think about sending an announcement to the *Morning Post*.

FLEMING.

You think of everything, Pearl.

PEARL.

I take my duties as Bessie's chaperon very seriously. I've already got a brilliant idea for the gown I'm going to wear at the wedding.

FLEMING.

Gee!

PEARL.

My dear Fleming, don't say Gee, it's so American. Say By Jove.

FLEMING.

I couldn't without laughing.

PEARL.

Laughing. Why can't you say laughing?

FLEMING.

I don't want to.

PEARL.

How obstinate you are. Of course, now that Bessie is going to marry an Englishman she'll have to take lessons. I know an excellent woman. She's taught all the American peeresses.

FLEMING.

You surprise me.

PEARL.

She's got a wonderful method. She makes you read aloud. And she has long lists of words that you have to repeat twenty times a day—half instead of haf, and barth instead of bath, and carnt instead of cant.

FLEMING.

By Jove instead of Gee ?

PEARL.

Peeresses don't say By Jove, Fleming. She teaches them to say Good heavens instead of Mercy.

FLEMING.

Does she make money by it ?

PEARL.

Pots. She's a lovely woman. Eleo Dorset had an accent that you could cut with a knife when she first came over, and in three months she hadn't got any more than I have.

BESSIE.

[*Getting up. To FLEMING.*] D'you think it's too hot for a turn in the garden ?

FLEMING.

Why, no.

BESSIE.

Shall we go then ?

[*They go out together.*]

PEARL.

What's the matter with Bessie? She must have swallowed a poker last night. No wonder she couldn't sleep. It's enough to give anyone indigestion.

CLAY.

You know that Minnie is going away this afternoon, Pearl?

PEARL.

Yes, so I heard. It's such a bore there are no cars to take her to the station. She'll have to go in the luggage cart.

CLAY.

She doesn't wish to see you.

PEARL.

Oh, but I wish to see her.

CLAY.

I daresay.

PEARL.

I must see her.

CLAY.

She asked me to tell you that she only wished you to do one thing, and that is to keep out of the way till she's gone.

PEARL.

Then you can go and tell her that unless she sees me she shan't have the luggage cart.

CLAY.

Pearl!

PEARL.

That's my ultimatum.

CLAY.

Can you see me taking a message like that to the Duchesse?

PEARL.

It's four miles to the station, and there's not a scrap of shade all the way.

CLAY.

After all, it's not a very unreasonable request she's making.

PEARL.

If she wants the luggage cart she must come and say good-bye to me like a lady.

CLAY.

[*To the PRINCESS.*] What am I to do? We used up all the sal volatile last night.

PRINCESS.

I'll tell her if you like. D'you really insist on seeing her, Pearl?

PEARL.

Yes, it's very important. [*The PRINCESS goes out. PEARL watches her go with a smile.*] I'm afraid Flora is shocked. She shouldn't know such people.

CLAY.

Really, Pearl, your behaviour is monstrous.

PEARL.

Never mind about my behaviour. Tell me how luncheon went off.

CLAY.

My dear, it was like a gathering of relations who hate one another, after the funeral of a rich aunt who's left all her money to charity.

PEARL.

It must have been priceless. I'd have given anything to be there.

CLAY.

Why weren't you ?

PEARL.

Oh, I knew there'd be scenes, and I'm never at my best in a scene before luncheon. One of the things I've learnt from the war is that a general should choose his own time for a battle.

CLAY.

Minnie moved heaven and earth to get away this morning.

PEARL.

I knew she couldn't. I knew none of them could go till the afternoon.

CLAY.

The train service is atrocious.

PEARL.

George says that is one of the advantages of the place. It keeps it rural. There's one at nine and another at half-past four. I knew that not even the most violent disturbances would get people up at eight who never by any chance have breakfast till ten. As soon as I awoke I took the necessary steps.

CLAY.

[*Interrupting.*] You slept ?

PEARL.

Oh yes, I slept beautifully. There's nothing like a little excitement to give me a good night.

CLAY.

Well, you certainly had some excitement. I've rarely witnessed such a terrific scene.

PEARL.

I sent out to the garage and gave instructions that the old Rolls-Royce was to be taken down at once and the other was to go to London.

CLAY.

What for ?

PEARL.

Never mind. You'll know presently. Then I did a little telephoning.

CLAY.

Why were you so anxious to prevent anybody from leaving the house ?

PEARL.

I couldn't have persuaded myself that my party was a success if half my guests had left me on Sunday morning. I thought they might change their minds by the afternoon.

CLAY.

If that's your only reason, I don't think it's a very good one.

PEARL.

It isn't. I will be frank with you, Thornton. I can imagine that a very amusing story might be made out of this episode. I never mind scandal, but I don't expose myself to ridicule if I can help it.

CLAY.

My dear Pearl, surely you can trust the discretion of your guests. Who do you think will give it away?

PEARL.

You.

CLAY.

I? My dear Pearl, I give you my word of honour . . .

PEARL.

[*Calmly.*] My dear Thornton, I don't care two-pence about your word of honour. You're a professional entertainer, and you'll sacrifice everything to a good story. Why, don't you remember that killing story about your father's death? You dined out a whole season on it.

CLAY.

Well, it was a perfectly killing story. No one would have enjoyed it more than my poor old father.

PEARL.

I'm not going to risk anything, Thornton. I think it's much better there should be no story to tell.

CLAY.

No one can move the clock backwards, Pearl. I couldn't help thinking at luncheon that there were the elements of a very good story indeed.

PEARL.

And you'll tell it, Thornton. Then I shall say: My dear, does it sound probable? They all stayed quite happily till Monday morning; Sturrey and the Arlingtons dined on the Sunday night, and we had a very merry evening. Besides, I was lunching with Minnie only two days afterwards. And I shall say: Poor Thornton, he *is* such a liar, isn't he?

CLAY.

I confess that if you are reconciled with Minnie it will take a great deal of the point away from my story. What about Arthur Fenwick?

PEARL.

He's a sensualist, and the sensual are always sentimental.



CLAY.

He scared me dreadfully at luncheon. He was eating a dressed crab, and his face grew every minute more purple. I was expecting him to have an apoplectic fit.

PEARL.

It's not an unpleasant death, you know, Thornton, to have a stroke while you're eating your favourite dish.

CLAY.

You know, there are no excuses for you, Pearl.

PEARL.

Human nature excuses so much, Thornton.

CLAY.

You really might have left Tony alone. This habit you have of snitching has got you into trouble before.

PEARL.

People are so selfish. It just happens that I find no man so desirable as one that a friend of mine is in love with. I make allowances for the idiosyncrasies of my friends. Why shouldn't they make allowances for mine?

[*The DUCHESS comes in, erect and haughty, with the air of Boadicea facing the Roman legions. PEARL turns to her with an ingratiating smile.*]

PEARL.

Ah, Minnie.

DUCHESSE.

I'm told the only way I can leave this house is by submitting to the odious necessity of seeing you.

PEARL.

I wish you wouldn't go, Minnie. Lord Sturrey is coming over to dinner to-night, and so are the Arlingtons. I always take a lot of trouble to get the right people together, and I hate it when anybody fails me at the last minute.

DUCHESSE.

D'you think anything would have induced me to stay so long if there'd been any possibility of getting away ?

PEARL.

It wouldn't have been nice to go without saying good-bye to me.

DUCHESSE.

Don't talk nonsense, Pearl.

PEARL.

D'you know that you behaved very badly last night, and I ought to be extremely angry with you ?

DUCHESSE.

I ? Thornton, the woman's as mad as a hatter.

PEARL.

You really oughtn't to have made a scene before Harry Bleane. And, you know, to tell Arthur wasn't playing the game. If you wanted to tell anyone, why didn't you tell George ?

DUCHESS.

In the first place, he wasn't here. He never is.

PEARL.

I know. He says that now society has taken to coming down to the country for week-ends he prefers London.

DUCHESS.

I'll never forgive you. Never. Never. Never. You'd got Arthur Fenwick. Why weren't you satisfied with him? If you wanted to have an affair with anyone, why didn't you take Thornton? He's almost the only one of your friends with whom you haven't. The omission is becoming almost marked.

PEARL.

Thornton never makes love to me except when other people are looking. He can be very passionate in the front seat of my box at the opera.

CLAY.

This conversation is growing excessively personal. I'll leave you. [He goes out.]

PEARL.

I'm sorry I had to insist on your seeing me, but I had something quite important to say to you.

DUCHESS.

Before you go any further, Pearl, I wish to tell you that I'm going to marry Tony.

PEARL.

[*Aghast.*] Minnie! Oh, my dear, you're not doing it to spite me? You know, honestly he doesn't interest me in the slightest. Oh, Minnie, do think carefully.

DUCESSE.

It's the only way I can keep him.

PEARL.

D'you think you'll be happy?

DUCESSE.

What should you care if I'm happy?

PEARL.

Of course I care. D'you think it's wise? You're giving yourself into his hands. Oh, my dear, how can you risk it?

DUCESSE.

He said he was going out to the colonies. I love him. . . . I believe you're really distressed. How strange you are, Pearl! Perhaps it's the best thing for me. He may settle down. I was very lonely sometimes, you know. Sometimes, when I had the blues, I almost wished I'd never left home.

PEARL.

And I've been moving heaven and earth to get him a job. I've been on the telephone this morning to all the Cabinet ministers I know, and at last I've done it. That's what I wanted to tell you. I thought you'd be so pleased. I suppose now he won't want it.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, I'm sure he will. He's very proud, you know. That's one of the things I liked in him. He had to be dependent on me, and that's one of the reasons why he always wanted to marry me.

PEARL.

Of course, you'll keep your title.

DUCHESSE.

Oh yes, I shall do that.

PEARL.

[*Going towards her as if to kiss her.*] Well, darling, you have my very, very best wishes.

DUCHESSE.

[*Drawing back.*] I'm not going to forgive you, Pearl.

PEARL.

But you've forgiven Tony.

DUCHESSE.

I don't blame him. He was led away.

PEARL.

Come, Minnie, don't be spiteful. You might let bygones be bygones.

DUCHESSE.

Nothing will induce me to stay in this house another night.

PEARL.

It's a very slow train, and you'll have to go without your tea.

DUCESSE.

I don't care.

PEARL.

You won't arrive in London till half-past eight, and you'll have to dine in a restaurant

DUCESSE

I don't care.

PEARL.

You'll be grubby and hot. Tony will be hungry and out of temper. And you'll look your age.

DUCESSE.

You promised me the luggage cart.

PEARL.

[*With a sigh.*] You shall have it; but you'll have to sit on the floor, because it hasn't got any seats.

DUCESSE.

Pearl, it's not going to break down on the way to the station?

PEARL.

Oh no. How can you suspect me of playing a trick like that on you? . . . [*With a tinge of regret.*] It never occurred to me.

[THORNTON CLAY comes in.]

CLAY.

Pearl, I thought you'd like to know that Fenwick is coming to say good-bye to you.

DUCESSE.

I'll go and tell Tony about the job you've got him. By the way, what is it ?

PEARL.

Oh, it's something in the Education Office.

DUCESSE.

How very nice. What do they do there ?

PEARL.

Nothing. But it'll keep him busy from ten to four  
[*The DUCESSE goes out.*]

PEARL.

She's going to marry him.

CLAY.

I know.

PEARL.

I'm a wonderful matchmaker. First Bessie and Harry Bleane, and now Minnie and Tony Paxton. I shall have to find someone for you, Thornton.

CLAY

How on earth did you manage to appease her ?

PEARL.

I reasoned with her. After all, she should be glad the boy has sown his wild oats before he marries. And besides, if he were her husband, of course she wouldn't expect fidelity from him; it seems unnatural to expect it when he isn't.

CLAY.

But she's going, all the same.

PEARL.

I've got a quarter of an hour yet. Give me your handkerchief, will you ?

CLAY.

[*Handing it to her.*] You're not going to burst into tears ?

PEARL.

[*She rubs her cheeks violently.*] I thought I ought to look a little wan and pale when Arthur comes in.

CLAY.

You'll never love me, Pearl. You tell me all your secrets.

PEARL.

Shall I tell you what to do about it ? Take the advice I give to Americans who come over to London and want to see the Tower: say you've been, and don't go.

CLAY.

D'you think you can bring Arthur round ?



PEARL.

I'm sure I could if he loved me.

CLAY.

My dear, he dotes on you.

PEARL.

Don't be a fool, Thornton. He loves his love for me. That's quite a different thing. I've only got one chance. He sees himself as the man of iron. I'm going to play the dear little thing racket.

CLAY.

You're a most unscrupulous woman, Pearl.

PEARL.

Not more than most. Please go. I think he ought to find me alone.

[CLAY goes out. PEARL seats herself in a pensive attitude and looks down at the carpet ; in her hand she holds dejectedly an open volume of poetry. Presently ARTHUR FENWICK comes in. She pretends not to see him. He is the strong man, battered but not beaten, struggling with the emotion which he tries to master.]

FENWICK.

Pearl !

PEARL.

[With a jump.] Oh, how you startled me. I didn't hear you come in.

FENWICK.

I daresay you're surprised to see me. I thought it was necessary that we should have a short conversation before I left this house.

PEARL.

[*Looking away.*] I'm glad to see you once more.

FENWICK.

You understand that everything is over between us.

PEARL.

If you've made up your mind, there's nothing for me to say. I know that nothing can move you when you've once done that.

FENWICK.

[*Drawing himself up a little.*] No. That has always been part of my power.

PEARL.

I wouldn't have you otherwise.

FENWICK.

I don't want to part from you in anger, Pearl. Last night I could have thrashed you within an inch of your life.

PEARL.

Why didn't you? D'you think I'd have minded that from the man I loved?

FENWICK.

You know I could never hit a woman.

PEARL.

I thought of you all through the long hours of the night, Arthur.

FENWICK.

I never slept a wink.

PEARL.

One would never think it. You must be made of iron.

FENWICK.

I think I am sometimes.

PEARL.

Am I very pale ?

FENWICK.

A little.

PEARL.

I feel a perfect wreck.

FENWICK.

You must go and lie down. It's no good making yourself ill.

PEARL.

Oh, don't bother about me, Arthur.

FENWICK.

I've bothered about you so long. It's difficult for me to get out of the habit all at once.

PEARL.

Every word you say stabs me to the heart.

FENWICK.

I'll get done quickly with what I had to tell you and then go. It's merely this. Of course, I shall continue the allowance I've always made you.

PEARL.

Oh, I couldn't take it. I couldn't take it.

FENWICK.

You must be reasonable, Pearl. This is a matter of business.

PEARL.

It's a question I refuse to discuss. Nothing would have induced me to accept your help if I hadn't loved you. Now that there can be nothing more between us—no, no, the thought outrages me.

FENWICK.

I was afraid that you'd take up that attitude. Remember that you've only got eight thousand a year of your own. You can't live on that.

PEARL.

I can starve.

FENWICK.

I must insist, Pearl, for my own sake. You've adopted a style of living which you would never have done if you hadn't had me at the back of you. I'm morally responsible, and I must meet my obligations

PEARL.

We can only be friends in future, Arthur.

FENWICK.

I haven't often asked you to do anything for me, Pearl.

PEARL.

I shall return your presents. Let me give you my pearl necklace at once.

FENWICK

Girlie, you wouldn't do that.

PEARL.

[*Pretending to try and take the necklace off.*] I can't undo the clasp. Please help me.

[*She goes up to him and turns her back so that he may get at it.*]

FENWICK.

I won't. I won't.

PEARL.

I'll tear it off my neck.

FENWICK.

Pearl, you break my heart. Do you care for me so little that you can't bear to wear the trifling presents I gave you ?

PEARL

If you talk to me like that I shall cry. Don't you see that I'm trying to keep my self-control ?

FENWICK.

This is dreadful. This is even more painful than I anticipated.

PEARL.

You see, strength is easy to you. I'm weak. That's why I put myself in your hands. I felt your power instinctively.

FENWICK.

I know, I know, and it ~~was~~ because I felt you needed me that I loved you. I wanted to shelter you from the storms and buffets of the world.

PEARL.

Why didn't you save me from myself, Arthur?

FENWICK.

When I look at your poor, pale little face I wonder what you'll do without me, girlie.

PEARL.

[*Her voice breaking.*] It'll be very hard. I've grown so used to depending on you. Whenever anything has gone wrong, I've come to you and you've put it right. I was beginning to think there was nothing you couldn't do.

FENWICK.

I've always welcomed obstacles. I like something to surmount. It excites me.

PEARL.

You seemed to take all my strength from me. I felt strangely weak beside you.

FENWICK.

It wasn't necessary that we should both be strong. I loved you because you were weak. I liked you to come to me in all your troubles. It made me feel so good to be able to put everything right for you.

PEARL.

You've always been able to do the impossible

FENWICK.

[*Impressively.*] I have never found anything impossible.

PEARL.

[*Deeply moved.*] Except to forgive.

FENWICK.

Ah, I see you know me. I never forget. I never forgive.

PEARL.

I suppose that's why people feel there's something strangely Napoleonic about you.

FENWICK.

Maybe. And yet—though you're only a woman, you've broken me, Pearl, you've broken me.

PEARL.

Oh no, don't say that. I couldn't bear that. I want you to go on being strong and ruthless.

FENWICK.

Something has gone out of my life for ever. I almost think you've broken my heart. I was so proud of you. I took so much pleasure in your success. Why, whenever I saw your name in the society columns of the papers it used to give me a thrill of satisfaction. What's going to become of you now, girlie? What's going to become of you now?

PEARL.

I don't know; I don't care.

FENWICK.

This fellow, does he care for you? Will he make you happy?

PEARL.

Tony? He's going to marry the Duchesse. [FENWICK *represses a start.*] I shall never see him again.

FENWICK.

Then if I leave you, you'll have nobody but your husband.

PEARL.

Nobody.

FENWICK.

You'll be terribly lonely, girlie.



PEARL.

You will think of me sometimes, Arthur, won't you ?

FENWICK.

I shall never forget you, girlie. I shall never forget how you used to leave your fine house in Mayfair and come and lunch with me down town.

PEARL.

You used to give me such delicious things to eat.

FENWICK.

It was a treat to see you in your beautiful clothes sharing a steak with me and a bottle of beer. I can order a steak, Pearl, can't I ?

PEARL.

And d'you remember those delicious little onions that we used to have ? [*She seems to taste them.*] M . . . M . . . M . . . It makes my mouth water to think of them.

FENWICK.

There are few women who enjoy food as much as you do, Pearl.

PEARL.

D'you know, next time you dined with me, I'd made up my mind to give you an entirely English dinner. Scotch broth, herrings, mixed grill, saddle of lamb, and then enormous marrow bones.

[FENWICK *can hardly bear the thought, his face grows red, his eyes bulge, and he gasps.*]

FENWICK.

Oh, girlie ! [*With utter abandonment.*] Let's have that dinner. [*He seizes her in his arms and kisses her.*] I can't leave you. You need me too much.

PEARL.

Arthur, Arthur, can you forgive me ?

FENWICK.

To err is human, to forgive divine.

PEARL.

Oh, how like you that is !

FENWICK.

If you must deceive me, don't let me ever find out. I love you too much.

PEARL.

I won't, Arthur, I promise you I won't.

FENWICK.

Come and sit on the sofa and let me look at you. I seem to see you for the first time.

PEARL.

You know, you wouldn't have liked the walk to the station. It's four miles in the sun. You're a vain old thing, and your boots are always a little too small for you.

[*BESSIE comes in. She stops as she sees PEARL and FENWICK sitting hand in hand.*]

PEARL.

Are you going out, Bessie ?

BESSIE.

As soon as Harry has finished his letters, we're going for a walk.

PEARL.

[*To FENWICK.*] You mustn't squeeze my hand in Bessie's presence, Arthur.

FENWICK.

You're a very lucky girl, Bessie, to have a sister like Pearl. She's the most wonderful woman in the world.

PEARL.

You're talking nonsense, Arthur. Go and put some flannels on. It makes me quite hot to look at you in that suit. We'll try and get up a little tennis after tea.

FENWICK.

Now, you mustn't tire yourself, Pearl. Remember those white cheeks of yours.

PEARL.

[*With a charming look at him.*] Oh, I shall soon get my colour back now.

[*She gives him her hand to kiss and he goes out. PEARL takes a little mirror out of her bag and looks at herself reflectively.*]

PEARL.

Men are very trivial, foolish creatures. They have kind hearts. But their heads. Oh dear, oh dear, it's lamentable. They have a mechanical intelligence. And they're so vain, poor dears, they're so vain.

BESSIE.

Pearl, to-morrow, when we go back to London, I'm going away.

PEARL.

Are you ? Where ?

BESSIE.

The Princess is going to take me over to Paris for a few days.

PEARL.

Oh, is that all ? Don't stay away too long. You ought to be in London just at present.

BESSIE.

On my return I'm proposing to stay with the Princess.

PEARL.

[*Calmly.*] Nonsense.

BESSIE.

I wasn't asking your permission, Pearl. I was telling you my plans.

PEARL.

[*Looks at her for a moment reflectively.*] Are you going to make me a scene, too ? I've already gone through two this afternoon. I'm rather tired of them

BESSIE.

Please don't be alarmed. I've got nothing more to say.

*[She makes as though to leave the room.]*

PEARL.

Don't be a little fool, Bessie. You've been staying with me all the season. I can't allow you to leave my house and go and live with Flora. We don't want to go out of our way to make people gossip.

BESSIE.

Please don't argue with me, Pearl. It's not my business to reproach you for anything you do. But it isn't my business, either, to stand by and watch.

PEARL.

You're no longer a child, Bessie.

BESSIE.

I've been blind and foolish. Because I was happy and having a good time, I never stopped to ask for explanations of this, that and the other. I never thought. . . . The life was so gay and brilliant—it never struck me that underneath it all— Oh, Pearl, don't make me say what I have in my heart, but let me go quietly.

PEARL.

Bessie, dear, you must be reasonable. Think what people would say if you suddenly left my house. They'd ask all sorts of questions, and heaven knows what explanations they'd invent. People aren't

charitable, you know. I don't want to be hard on you, but I can't afford to let you do a thing like that.

BESSIE.

Now that I know what I do, I should never respect myself again if I stayed.

PEARL.

I don't know how you can be so unkind.

BESSIE.

I don't want to be that, Pearl. But it's stronger than I am. I must go.

PEARL.

[*With emotion.*] I'm so fond of you, Bessie. You don't know how much I want you with me. After all, I've seen so little of you these last few years. It's been such a comfort to me to have you. You were so pretty and young and sweet, it was like a ray of April sunshine in the house.

BESSIE.

I'm afraid you think women are as trivial, foolish creatures as men, Pearl.

[PEARL looks up and sees that BESSIE is not in the least taken in by the pathetic attitude.]

PEARL.

[*Iceily.*] Take care you don't go too far, Bessie.

BESSIE.

There's no need for us to quarrel. I've made up my mind, and there's the end of it.

PEARL.

Flora's a fool. I shall tell her that I won't have her take you away from me. You'll stay with me until you're married.

BESSIE.

D'you want me to tell you that I can hardly bear to speak to you? You fill me with shame and disgust. I want never to see you again.

PEARL.

Really, you drive me beyond endurance. I think I must be the most patient woman in the world to put up with all I've had to put up with to-day. After all, what have I done? I was a little silly and incautious. By the fuss you all make one would think no one had ever been incautious and silly before. Besides, it hasn't got anything to do with you. Why don't you mind your own business?

BESSIE.

[*Bitterly.*] You talk as though your relations with Arthur Fenwick were perfectly natural.

PEARL.

Good heavens, you're not going to pretend you didn't know about Arthur. After all, I'm no worse than anybody else. Why, one of the reasons we Americans like London is that we can live our own

lives and people accept things philosophically. Eleo Gloster, Sadie Twickenham, Maimie Hartlepool—you don't imagine they're faithful to their husbands? They didn't marry them for that.

BESSIE.

Oh, Pearl, how can you? How can you? Haven't you any sense of decency at all? When I came in just now and saw you sitting on the sofa with that gross, vulgar, sensual old man—oh! [*She makes a gesture of disgust.*] You can't love him. I could have understood if . . . but—oh, it's so disgraceful, it's so hideous. What can you see in him? He's nothing but rich. . . . [*She pauses, and her face changes as a thought comes to her, and coming horrifies her.*] It's not because he's rich? Pearl! Oh!

PEARL.

Really, Bessie, you're very silly, and I'm tired of talking to you.

BESSIE.

Pearl, it's not that? Answer me. Answer me.

PEARL.

[*Roughly.*] Mind your own business.

BESSIE.

He was right then, last night, when he called you that. He was so right that you didn't even notice it. A few hours later you're sitting hand in hand with him. A slut. That's what he called you. A slut. A slut.



PEARL.

How dare you ! Hold your tongue. How dare you !

BESSIE.

A kept woman. That's what you are.

PEARL.

[*Recovering herself.*] I'm a fool to lose my temper with you.

BESSIE.

Why should you ? I'm saying nothing but the truth.

PEARL.

You're a silly little person, Bessie. If Arthur helps me a little, that's his affair, and mine. He's got more money than he knows what to do with, and it amuses him to see me spend it. I could have twenty thousand a year from him if I chose.

BESSIE.

Haven't you got money of your own ?

PEARL.

You know exactly what I've got. Eight thousand a year. D'you think I could have got the position I have on that ? You're not under the impression all the world comes to my house because of my charm, are you ? I'm not. You don't think the English want us here ? You don't think they like us marrying their men ? Good heavens, when you've

known England as long as I have, you'll realise that in their hearts they still look upon us as savages and Red Indians. We have to force ourselves upon them. They come to me because I amuse them. Very early in my career I discovered that the English can never resist getting something for nothing. If a dancer is the rage, they'll see her at my house. If a fiddler is in vogue, they'll hear him at my concert. I give them balls. I give them dinners. I've made myself the fashion, I've got power, I've got influence. But everything I've got—my success, my reputation, my notoriety—I've bought it, bought it, bought it.

BESSIE.

How humiliating !

PEARL.

And, finally, I've bought you a husband.

BESSIE.

That's not true. He loves me.

PEARL.

D'you think he'd have loved you if I hadn't shown you to him in these surroundings, if I hadn't dazzled him by the brilliant people among whom he found you. You don't know what love is made of. D'you think it's nothing that he should hear a Prime Minister pay you compliments. Of course I bought him.

BESSIE.

[*Aghast.*] It's horrible.

PEARL.

You know the truth now. It'll be very useful to you in your married life. Run away and take your little walk with Harry Bleane. I'm going to arrange my face.

[*She goes out. BESSIE is left ashamed and stunned. BLEANE comes in.*]

BLEANE.

I'm afraid I've kept you waiting. I'm so sorry.

BESSIE.

[*Dully.*] It doesn't matter at all.

BLEANE.

Where shall we go? You know the way about these parts, and I don't.

BESSIE.

Harry, I want you to release me. I can't marry you.

BLEANE.

[*Aghast.*] Why?

BESSIE.

I want to go back to America. I'm frightened.

BLEANE.

Of me?

BESSIE.

Oh no, I know that you're a dear, good creature: I'm frightened of what I may become.

BLEANE.

But I love you, Bessie.

BESSIE.

Then that's all the more reason for me to go. I must tell you frankly. I'm not in love with you, I only like you. I would never have dreamt of marrying you, if you hadn't been who you are. I wanted to have a title. That's why Pearl married her husband, and that's why the Duchesse married. Let me go, Harry.

BLEANE.

I knew you didn't love me, but I thought you might come to in time. I thought if I tried I could make you love me.

BESSIE.

You didn't know that I was nothing but a self-seeking, heartless snob.

BLEANE.

I don't care what you say of yourself, I know that you can be nothing but what is true and charming.

BESSIE.

After what you've seen last night? After what you know of this house? Aren't you disgusted with all of us?

BLEANE.

You can't think I could class you with the Duchesse and . . . [*He stops.*]

BESSIE.

Pearl at my age was no different from what I am. It's the life.

BLEANE.

But perhaps you won't want to lead it. The set you've been living in here isn't the only set in England. It makes a stir because it's in the public eye. Its doings are announced in the papers. But it isn't a very good set, and there are plenty of people who don't very much admire it.

BESSIE.

You must let me try and say what I have in my heart. And be patient with me. You think I can make myself at home in your life. I've had a hint of it now and then. I've seen a glimpse of it through Pearl's laughter and the Duchesse's sneers. It's a life of dignity, of responsibilities, and of public duty.

BLEANE.

[*With a rueful smile.*] You make it very strenuous.

BESSIE.

It comes naturally to the English girls of your class. They've known it all their lives, and they've been brought up to lead it. But we haven't. To us it's just tedious, and its dignity is irksome. We're bored, and we fall back on the only thing that offers, pleasure. You've spoken to me about your house. It means everything to you because it's associated with your childhood and all your people before you. It could only mean something to me if I loved you. And I don't.

BLEANE.

You've made me so wretched. I don't know what to say to you.

BESSIE.

If I make you wretched now, it's so that we may both be saved a great deal of unhappiness later on. I'm glad I don't care for you, for it would make it so much harder for me to go. And I've got to go. I can't marry you. I want to go home. If I marry ever I want to marry in my own country. That is my place.

BLEANE.

Don't you think you could wait a little before you decide finally?

BESSIE.

Don't put difficulties in my way. Don't you see that we're not strong enough for the life over here? It goes to our head; we lose our bearings; we put away our own code, and we can't adopt the code of the country we come to. We drift. There's nothing for us to do but to amuse ourselves, and we fall to pieces. But in America we're safe. And perhaps America wants us. When we come over here we're like soldiers deserting our country in time of war. Oh, I'm homesick for America. I didn't know how much it meant to me till now. Let me go back, Harry.

BLEANE.

If you don't want to marry me, of course, I'm not going to try and make you.

BESSIE.

Don't be angry, and be my friend always.

BLEANE.

Always.

BESSIE.

After all, three months ago you didn't know me. In three months more you will have forgotten me. Then marry some English girl, who can live your life and share your thoughts. And be happy.

[PEARL comes in. *She has rouged her cheeks, and has once more the healthy colour which is usual with her. She is evidently jubilant.*]

PEARL.

The car has just come back from London. [*She goes to the french window and calls.*] Minnie!

BESSIE.

I shall tell Pearl to-morrow.

BLEANE.

I won't post my letters then. I'll go and get them out of the box.

BESSIE.

Forgive me.

[*He goes out. The DUCHESS and CLAY appear at the window.*]

DUCHESSE.

Did you call me?

PEARL.

The car has just come back from London, so it can take you to the station.

DUCHESSE.

That's a mercy. I didn't at all like the idea of going to the station in the luggage cart. Where is Flora ? I must say good-bye to her.

PEARL.

Oh, there's plenty of time now. The car will run you down in ten minutes.

[TONY comes in, then the PRINCESS and FLEMING.]

DUCHESSE.

Tony, the car has returned, and is going to take us to the station.

TONY.

Thank God for that ! I should have looked a perfect fool in that luggage cart.

CLAY.

But what on earth did you send the car to London for, anyway ?

PEARL.

In one minute you'll see.

[ARTHUR FENWICK comes in. He has changed into flannels.]

FENWICK.

Who is that gentleman that's just arrived, Pearl ?

PEARL.

The man of mystery.

[The BUTLER comes in, followed by ERNEST, and after announcing him goes out.]



POLE.

Mr. Ernest.

DUCHESS.

Ernest !

CLAY.

Ernest ?

*[He is a little dark man, with large eyes, and long hair neatly plastered down. He has the look of a hairdresser. He is dressed like a tailor's dummy, in black coat, white gloves, silk hat, patent leather boots. He is a dancing master, and overwhelmingly gentlemanly. He speaks in mincing tones.]*

ERNEST

Dear Lady Grayston.

PEARL.

*[Shaking hands with him.]* I'm so glad you were able to come. *[To the others.]* You were talking about Ernest last night, and I thought we would have nothing to do this evening and he would cheer and comfort us. I sent the car up to London with orders to bring him back dead or alive.

ERNEST.

My dear Lady George, I'm sure I'll get into no end of trouble. I had all sorts of calls to pay this afternoon, and I was dining out, and I'd promised to go to a little hop that the dear Duchess of Gloster was giving. But I felt I couldn't refuse *you*. You've always been such a good friend to me, dear Lady

George. You must excuse me coming in my town clothes, but your chauffeur said there wasn't a moment to lose, so I came just as I am.

PEARL.

But you look a perfect picture.

ERNEST.

Oh, don't say that, dear Lady George; I know this isn't the sort of thing one ought to wear in the country.

PEARL.

You remember the Duchesse de Surennes?

ERNEST.

Oh, of course I remember the Duchesse.

DUCHESSE.

Dear Ernest!

ERNEST.

Dear Duchesse!

DUCHESSE.

I thought I was never going to see you again, Ernest.

ERNEST.

Oh, don't say that, it sounds too sad.

PEARL.

It's such a pity you must go, Minnie. Ernest could have shown you all sorts of new steps.

ERNEST.

Oh, dear Duchesse, you're not going the very moment I come down? That is unkind of you.

DUCHESSE.

[*With an effort.*] I must go. I must go.

ERNEST.

Have you been practising that little step I showed you the other day? My dear friend, the Marchioness of Twickenham—not the *old* one, you know, the *new* one—is beginning to do it so well.

DUCHESSE.

[*Struggling with herself.*] Have we time, Pearl? I should like Ernest to dance just one two-step with me.

PEARL.

Of course there's time. Thornton, set the gramophone.

[THORNTON CLAY *at once starts it, and the notes of the two-step tinkle out.*]

DUCHESSE.

You don't mind, Ernest, do you?

ERNEST.

I love dancing with you, Duchesse.  
[*They take up their positions.*]

DUCHESSE.

Just one moment. It always makes me so nervous to dance with you, Ernest.

ERNEST.

Oh, now, don't be silly, dear Duchesse.  
[*They begin to dance.*]

ERNEST.

Now hold your shoulders like a lady. Arch your back, my dear, arch your back. Don't look like a sack of potatoes. If you put your foot there, I shall kick it.

DUCHESSE.

Oh, Ernest, don't be cross with me.

ERNEST.

I shall be cross with you, Duchesse. You don't pay any attention to what I say. You must give your mind to it.

DUCHESSE.

I do ! I do !

ERNEST.

And don't dance like an old fish-wife. Put some vim into it. That's what I always say about these modern dances: you want two things, vim and nous.

DUCHESSE.

[*Plaintively.*] Ernest !

ERNEST.

Now don't cry. I'm saying all this for your good, you know. What's wrong with you is that you've got no passion.

DUCHESS.

Oh, Ernest, how can you say such a thing. I've always looked upon myself as a very passionate woman.

ERNEST.

I don't know anything about that, dear Duchesse, but you don't get it into your dancing. That's what I said the other day to the dear Marchioness of Twickenham—not the *new* one, you know, the *old* one—You must put passion into it, I said. That's what these modern dances want—passion, passion.

DUCHESS.

I see exactly what you mean, Ernest.

ERNEST.

And you must dance with your eyes as well, you know. You must look as if you had a knife in your garter, and as if you'd kill me if I looked at another woman. Don't you see how I'm looking, I'm looking as though I meant, Curse her! how I love her. There!

*[The music stops and they separate.]*

DUCHESS.

I have improved, Ernest, haven't I?

ERNEST.

Yes, you've improved, dear Duchesse, but you want more practice.

PEARL.

Minnie, why on earth don't you stay, and Ernest will give you a real lesson this evening.

ERNEST.

That's what you want, Duchesse.

[*The DUCHESSÉ wrestles with her soul.*]

DUCHESSÉ.

Tony, d'you think we can stop ?

TONY.

I didn't want to go away. It's rotten going up to town this evening. What on earth are we going to do with ourselves when we get there ?

DUCHESSÉ.

Very well, Pearl, if it'll please you, we'll stop.

PEARL.

That is nice of you, Minnie.

DUCHESSÉ.

You're very naughty sometimes, Pearl, but you have a good heart, and I can't help being fond of you.

PEARL.

[*With outstretched arms.*] Minnie !

DUCHESSE.

Pearl!

*[They clasp one another and affectionately embrace.]*

ERNEST.

What an exquisite spectacle—two ladies of title kissing one another.

BESSIE.

*[To FLEMING.]* They're not worth making a fuss about. I'm sailing for America next Saturday!

THE END

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